Mask Magic

This tutorial shows a couple of the ways masks can be useful in layouts. The layout below might not be the most obvious of applications for them (there are LOTS of ways and many of them simpler using just Illustrator!) but you'll understand the principles and broaden your skill set. The real message is, don't be frightened of using masks - they're very handy.

And, you won't end up with seriously huge Illustrator files with massive background images embedded in them.

I'm using masks here to create a honeycomb of images.

Obviously this is easily done in Illustrator using straightforward clipping masks but only works with a shape which, on having a clipping mask applied, loses its stroke.

Fine if that's what you're happy with.

You can copy the original shape and add it as a frame after clipping.

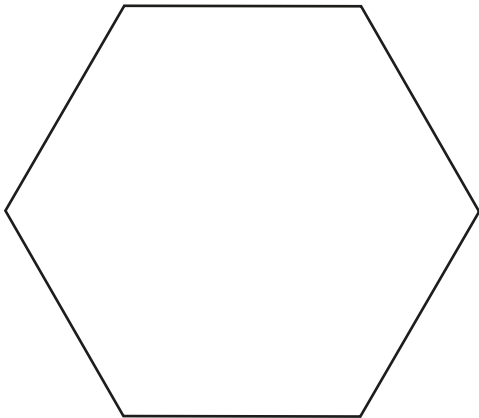Make the stroke bigger and expand, etc. You'll get a nice solid block of colour to frame the image.

But, what if you want to have a frame filled with an imported background/image? You'll end up with a white rectangular bounding box which will overlap neighbouring shapes if they get too close.

You can see exactly what I mean here. We can get around this limitation using simple masking techniques in Photoshop.

Your frame can then be filled with anybackground image - whatever you like, and can be arranged into a layout to showcase them.
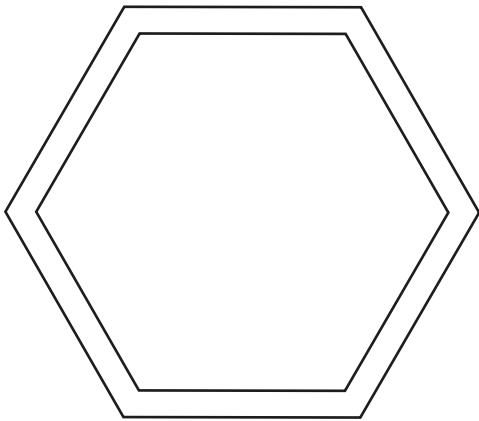
By following the tutorial, you'll pick up a couple of principles for using 'simple'masks in Photoshop and how nicely Illustrator and Photoshop work together. You'll find they come in useful in numerous ways when you know how to use them.
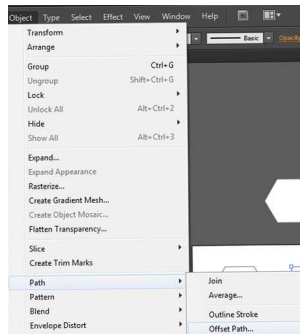
In Illustrator

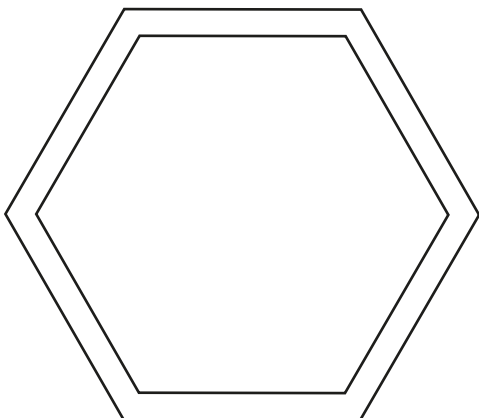Create a hexagonal shape from the Tools menu

Duplicate shape (eg, Copy>Paste .
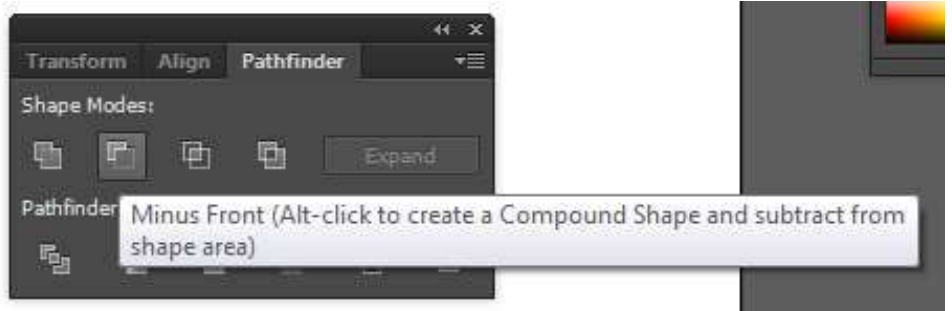or Hold down Alt, click on the shape and drag off a copy.

Go to Object>Path>Offset Path

Enter the offset value you want. I used -3mm.

Select both paths and click on Subtract from the Pathfinder menu.
This gives you an empty frame.

Select and copy the subtracted shape.
Create a new document in Photoshop.
PS will automatically default to a clipboard the size of the copied shape.
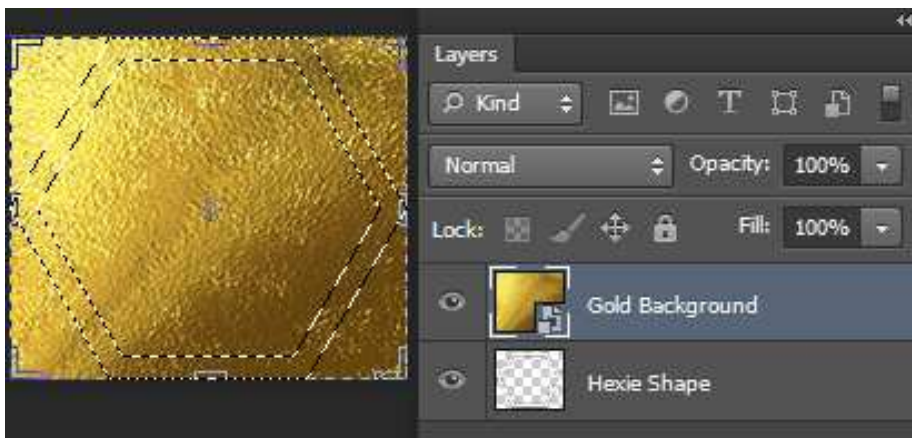Click 'Okay' and select 'Pixels' from the 'Paste As' options .

In Photoshop

Double-click on the layer and give it a title - eg, hexie shape.
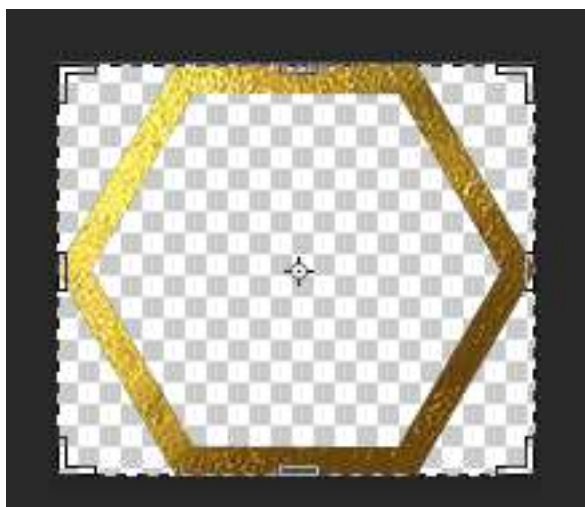Place the background image (File>Place) you want to fill your frame with.
Use the drag handles to size it so that it covers the hexie shape.

Control-click on the Hexie layer thumbnail

Note that the background layer is selected and positioned above the hexie shape layer.

Select Layer>Layer Mask>Reveal Selection

The Result

As alternatives, you could:

Fill the frame with a colour using the Bucket tool.

Again using the Bucket tool, but with the Foreground set to Pattern, fill it with a pattern. I don't believe you can scale the pattern with this method.

If you want to scale the pattern you can double-click on the Hexie layer and select Pattern Overlay. There you can play with the scale settings.

However you fill the hexies, you will want to add your image inside the frame.
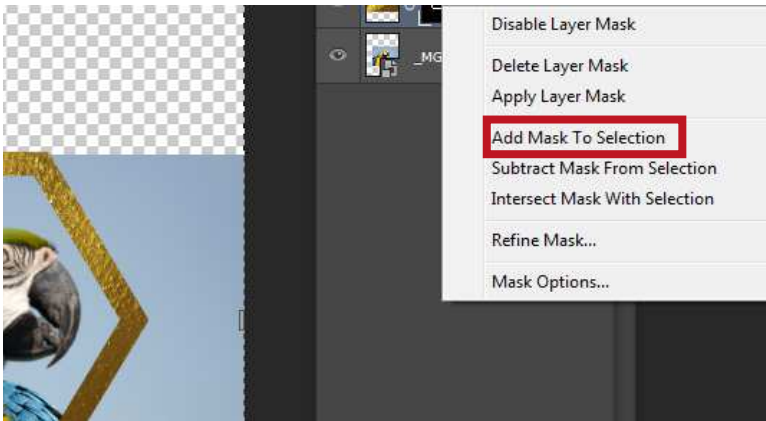
In Photoshop

The image is in position but too large for the frame. We can take the Eraser tool and simply rub out everything outside the hexie or create a mask to hide the bits we don't want visible.

The advantage of using a mask is that you can always re-adjust the position of the image later if needs be.
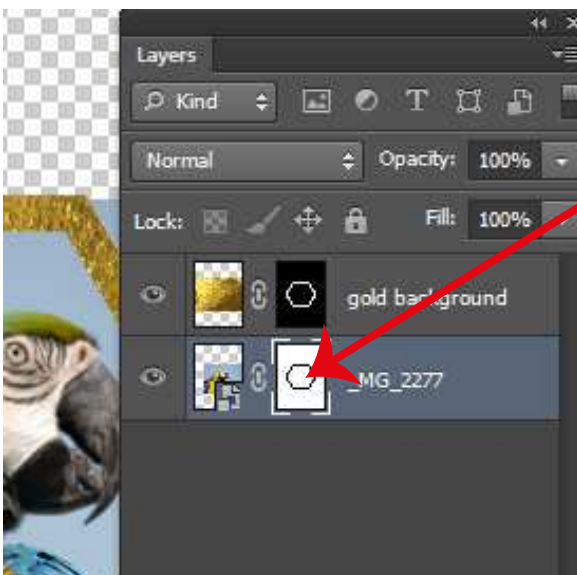
To Create a Mask
Right-click on the mask thumbnail on your hexie frame layer.
Select 'Add mask to selection' from the pop-up dialogue box.
Click onto the image layer (not Shift-click, only want one layer selected).
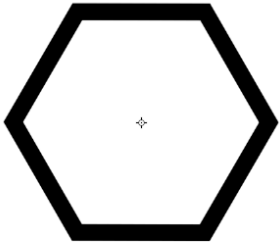Then go to Layer (main menu) >Layer Mask > Hide Selection.

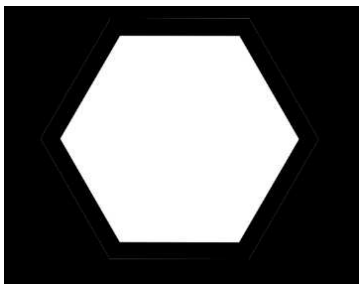From the Layers Palette, you will see each layer now has its own mask.

Alt-Click on the image layer mask thumbnail

In Photoshop

This white hexie with black frame is the result:

Take the Bucket tool, make sure the foreground colour is set to black and flood-fill the area around the hexie:

Now click back onto the image thumbnail.

You will now have your image clipped inside your hexie shape.

At this point, you could carry on and produce a whole montage of hexie images in Photoshop. I think it is easier to take it into Illustrator and finish the montage from there. The bigger the montage, the greater number of layers... you can link them but still...

Before you do this, Select All (Ctrl-A) and from the Edit menu, select Copy Merged'.

In Illustrator

Paste the hexie-image into Illustrator and send it to the back (Object > Arrange> Send to back).
Now take your original large hexie shape and align it directly over the image you've just pasted in.

Select both the hexie and the image-hexie then use the Align feature to centre vertically and horizontally.

With both selected, go to Object > Clipping Mask > Make.

In Illustrator

With the hexie-images now clipped, you can arrange them as closely together as you like - no white rectangle overlap.

It's all done! And you add a text-wrap around them as well, just to be fancy, like so. Hope the techniques will be useful for you.

As a boy the artist was not an industrious scholar. He looked upon reading and writing as rather troublesome and hardly worth the labor involved in learning them. Later he worked hard at his chosen career, and the great number of pictures that he painted is sufficient evidence that he was by no means lazy.

Probably Rembrandt's greatest fault was his extravagance. Many a man can endure adversity with courage; success is sometimes more difficult to bear. Hard luck often brings out the best in a man; success may destroy it. Rembrandt was no exception. He spent his money freely, and like the grasshopper of the fable, sang happily through the summer, with no thought of the cold to come.

He liked to attend sales of works of art, and he gladly paid huge sums for any pictures that caught his fancy. It is said that the dealers came very soon to know his rash and reckless methods and would push the prices far up, confident that Rembrandt would meet them. At the same time, the artist liked to buy expensive jewels for his wife. He loved Saskia devotedly, and he wanted her to have everything of the finest. This manner of open-handed living naturally played havoc with his finances.

When Saskia died Rembrandt was heartbroken. His customers fell off and many troubles overwhelmed him. His friends helped him as much as possible, but money ran through his hands like water through a sieve.