

# PreMame MAME Wrapper Guide

Standalone guide for the optional wrapper that loads separate console .lay files and safely falls back to default.lay when needed.

## What It Is

PreMame is a small launcher that starts the real MAME executable for you. It is mainly useful for console systems such as SNES, Genesis, NES, or SMS where MAME normally expects one shared artwork\system\default.lay file.

Instead of forcing every console game into one very large default.lay, PreMame lets you keep separate .lay files per game and only swap the matching one in for the current launch.

## What It Does

- Reads the MAME command line before the real emulator starts.
- Looks for the loaded cart or software name.
- Checks the configured artwork folder for a matching per-game .lay file.
- If a matching file exists, temporarily swaps it in as default.lay before MAME starts.
- When MAME closes, restores the original default.lay automatically.
- If no matching file exists, leaves default.lay alone and starts MAME normally.

## Why It Is Useful

- Keeps each console game's layout separate and easier to manage.
- Avoids one giant default.lay full of every game's score rules and artwork.
- Lets different games have different helper rows such as coins, rings, timer, or player counts.
- Protects the original console default.lay by restoring it after the session ends.

## What It Does Not Change

- It does not replace Layout Designer. You still use Layout Designer to build and export the actual .lay files.
- It does not permanently overwrite the original default.lay file for the console.
- It does not require the bridge Lua plugin in order to do the swap and restore work.
- It does not interfere with normal arcade artwork layouts that already load their own game-specific files.

## Typical Example

Example SNES artwork folder:

- artwork\snes\default.lay
- artwork\snes\Super Mario World 1.lay
- artwork\snes\Super Mario Kart.lay
- artwork\snes\F-Zero.lay

If you launch Super Mario World 1 and that matching .lay exists, PreMame temporarily copies it over default.lay for that run. If you launch another game with no matching .lay, the normal default.lay stays in use.

## How To Use It

- 1 Place PreMame beside your real MAME executable, or point it to the real executable in PreMame.ini.
- 2 Set the real MAME executable name in PreMame.ini, for example mame.exe or mame64.exe.
- 3 Map each console system to the correct artwork folder in PreMame.ini.
- 4 Keep the normal default.lay file in the console artwork folder.
- 5 Export each per-game layout using the real detected game name so PreMame can find it.
- 6 Launch the console game through PreMame instead of starting MAME directly.

## How It Fits With Layout Designer

Layout Designer is still where you position title text, labels, score boxes, helper rows, and formatting. PreMame only handles which finished .lay file gets presented to MAME at startup for console systems.

- Create or edit the layout in the app.
- Use Create Final .LAY or Create Custom .LAY to export the finished file.
- Save it with the correct game name.
- Let PreMame load that file automatically when the matching console game starts.

## Behavior Summary

Situation	What PreMame Does
Matching per-game .lay exists	Backs up the current default.lay, swaps in the matching game .lay, launches MAME, and restores the original when MAME closes.
No matching per-game .lay exists	Leaves the normal default.lay untouched and launches MAME normally.
Bridge plugin is disabled	PreMame still works because the wrapper does not rely on the Lua bridge for swap and restore.
Arcade game with its own normal layout	No console default swap is needed, so the normal MAME artwork flow continues unchanged.

## Important Naming Rule

For console use, exported final and custom .lay files should use the real detected game or profile name that MAME resolves for the loaded cart. That is the name PreMame searches for when deciding whether a per-game layout exists.

## Troubleshooting

Symptom	Likely Cause	Next Step
The console still uses the shared default layout	No matching per-game .lay file was found	Check the exported filename against the cart or software name that MAME actually reports.

Symptom	Likely Cause	Next Step
The wrong MAME executable starts	The configured real_exe value is wrong	Update PreMame.ini so it points to the correct real MAME binary.
default.lay looks changed while the game is running	That is expected during the temporary swap	Close MAME and confirm that the original default.lay is restored after exit.
You do not need per-game console layouts	The normal shared default layout is enough	Keep using default.lay on its own and you do not need the wrapper for that system.

## Bottom Line

Use PreMame when you want separate console .lay files per game but MAME normally loads one shared default.lay for that console system. It gives you per-game flexibility while still restoring the original default.lay safely after each session.