



## **Metal Frame Restoration**

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**Some of the most striking frames are often those decorated with gold, silver, brass, copper, pewter, bronze or other metallic based substance. While this feature may make the frame more attractive, it also poses a major challenge when it comes due for repair. In many instances, a restorer will experience difficulty in matching the metallic features for a newly restored area with the original metallic color. For example, an attempt to duplicate a "high mirrored gloss gold" can easily cure too dull or, in some cases, too bright (as in electro plated jewelry).**

**An important objective in the application of a metallic color to a restored area is to achieve the correct "tone". Many metallic colors are placed over a base coat patina of hues such as red, green, black, yellow, purple or pearlescent lusters. The correct "tone" can only be achieved if the color of the base coat patina on the restored area matches first. In some instances, the base color and metallic color can be fused together and applied as a mixed coating. Generally, the most common tone is brass, which is often mistaken for gold. Other frequently seen tones include white fire, florentine, classic, roman, leaf, renaissance, silver, pewter, copper and bronze.**

**It is not enough, however, for the restorer to capture the correct tone. Errors often occur in the way that golds or other metallic paints are applied to the surface of the frame. Some of these products may be very thick and will dry quickly. If they are not applied properly, the result can be a grainy, streaky or smudgy surface appearance. Unfortunately, it takes a restorer many hours of practice to develop the skills needed to properly apply golds and other metallics.**



**Top portion of a badly damaged French frame for a lovely old mirror.**



**Same top portion after restoration. Smoke damage has been cleaned, and red patina now shows through original gold.**



**Golds and other metallic colors are available in various forms. These include powders, foils, sprays, waxes, liquids, electro formulae, gels, pre-cut decal transfers, thermal cures and true karat. A word of warning: one expedient way to apply metallic paints is by spraying them onto the target surface. By applying these colors from a spray can, however, gives you little control over the application. The advantages of using an airbrush in the restoration process are excellent. An airbrush will allow the restorer the freedom to mix different formulae and spray them gently over the target surface using a variety of airbrushing techniques.**

**For the professional restorer, it is wise to set aside one airbrush to be used exclusively for the application of metallic paints. Metallic colors can also be applied using "writing pens". Normally, the tip of such a device has a pressure release system. This system, however, will often allow too much paint to escape at one time. You can drain the pen and apply that with a paint brush but this has limits. Therefore, a "writing pen" with a felt tip may give you more control over the application.**

**It is important to understand the compatibility of all products involved. If the metallic paint is compatible with the other materials used in a restoration, then the application of too much metallic paint (which is a common mistake) can be "softened" by using an appropriate diluting medium. In this way, the restorer can achieve a worn look that can often be found on some outer raised or broader areas of the frame. Having said that, how can one determine whether a metallic paint to be used is compatible with the other materials used in the restoration process?**

**The following is one simple way to test whether you will be using compatible products. Select a "dummy" frame or other expendable like object that is similar to the frame type being restored. Load that "dummy" area with the products such as the primer and base coat patina used in your normal restoration techniques. Apply a small amount of each metallic paint (any metallic products - not just paint) to be used to the "dummy" test project first. Then**

**Final gold applications, polished over the base patina and glossed.**



**This frame was stored in an attic and suffered extensive wasp damage.**



**Same frame as below left, after base patina was overcoated with several tones of golds and gloss.**

**use an airbrush to apply a high gloss finishing glaze over each test sampling of color. If the metallic is not compatible, you may observe it dissolving into a run or showing some other undesirable reaction. You may also want to test an airbrush of a semi-gloss, satin, and matte finish over a fresh sampling.**

**The true karat gold and silver leaf (most often seen in frames) can also be used. There are several different types of methods that can be used in this process as well as the traditional. But, while leaf has a smooth and mirrored appearance in its packaging, this look is difficult to duplicate when it is transferred to an adhesive surface. There are also electro plating processes that will give you the smooth and mirrored effect. However, this can also often be costly, allowing little flexibility in obtaining the correct tone and, along with the challenge offered by the size and shape of some frames, will many times eliminate electro plating as an application option.**

**A "thermal" curing process of selecting metallic leaf powders to be mixed into a clear powder base for a more permanent surface can be a better choice over older methods. This technique allows the "leaf" to be heated within the clear base as a catalyst is applied. During the formation process at the area on the object being restored, this thermal metallic finish cures to a hard, smooth, true luster. Since the leaf powder is cured thermally within the body of the clear powder fill base, the finish is reasonably permanent. This area can accept additional faux finish techniques, if needed, to reach a challenging final effect.**

**A few words of advice to anyone needing to restore a frame with gold, silver, or other metallic colored design. Ask the restorer to see examples of their other restorations that are similar to the work you will need done. Also, be satisfied that the restorer you select is able to safely clean your frame without further damaging metallic areas. Beware when purchasing a frame with a metallic colored design. Look close for possible cover-ups to a previously damaged area; the "entire" area may be coated due to lack of technique in matching the original surface in just the one spot. If you want to try the restoration yourself, using a**

**"dummy" test piece first should prove helpful.**

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