

Venetian Glass Frame Restoration

It is possible to restore a Venetian glass frame that once would have been discarded. If you have a mishap, get an opinion before throwing it away.

By DiAnna Tindell

Most people might assume that a damaged Venetian glass frame would be nearly impossible to restore. Often, those beautiful objects are discarded soon after a mishap. But today's technology of advanced products and techniques can offer some incredible solutions for the restorative needs of crystal and glass. A restoration specialist can create new parts, bond existing parts together, fuse or fill in cracks, remove scratches and stains, reapply golds, silvers, paints, etching and frosting.

Venetian glass is fragile and usually made in color. And there may be internal gold or silver flecks. It was first produced on the island of Murano, near Venice, as early as the 13th century.

The frame shown was purchased by a family living near Venice in the 1960s. It is an unusually large vanity mirror that stands up like a picture frame with a nice wood backing. The frame includes internal gold flecks within the corner flower/leaf pieces and the multiple roped glass rods framing all sides. There is a gold leaf layer behind the glass to add even more vibrance.

Restoration specialists are often asked to "reheat and/or fuse" cracked or broken glass. When glass is reheated to attempt a fuse of a crack, or to add a broken piece, it will often be unable to withstand the heat and may shatter. Newer or more reliable methods of making glass, however, allow for reheating of the piece.

Glass is mechanically rigid and, in this sense, behaves like a solid. However, the atoms within the glass are arranged in a random fashion. Such disordered structure is the characteristic of a liquid. In contrast, each atom in a



"Before" close view - Venetian glass mirror frame corner - replacement glass rods, flower & leaf parts, gold leaf base.



Application of clear mold material to make new parts as clear fill synthetic glass castings.



crystalline solid is held in a definite position within a structural pattern or lattice.

In glass, the atoms are arranged at random, frozen in position. Thus, glass combines some of the aspects of a crystalline solid and some of a liquid. For this reason, there are environmental changes that can control the outcome of a glass item before or after a restoration.

In the case of a crack that has opened to the surface, a non-yellowing liquid filler can be added to offer support and eliminate the reflection of light that would normally cause a crack to be visible. When attempting to bond broken pieces together, a non-yellowing adhesive should be used that will provide strength and support.

Usually, the area where the broken pieces are joined will hold better if the fit is intimate and not too thin. It is best to use a liquid etching product to create a microscopic abrasion prior to an application of the bonding agent, offering it a surface to "grab" onto.

If an area being restored is designed to withhold substantial weight and stress, it may be wise to provide additional support to the area with an application of clear material that would act as an overlay. Modern science has provided products to replace missing parts with synthetic liquid glass-like materials. These can be made clear or, through the use of additives such as paints or metallics, made to reproduce a special effect.

For Venetian gold fleck parts, real gold leaf can be crumbled into the clear liquid before it thermally heats to a solid part. A clear mold compound is helpful to allow a visual check on the progress of clear fills. Sometimes a stiffer mother mold, or a sand box, is required to provide better support and prevent distortion as the new part is formed. Dental processes are available that are cured with special dental light curing equipment to give exceptional glass-like fills and parts in just a few seconds.

Damaged areas that are frosted, etched or have a satin-type finish can be restored as well. The portion being rebuilt may

**Other supply items:
sandbox, clear fill parts,
clear mold & supportive
blue mold, crystal clear
bonding agent, gold leaf
sheets and flecks.**



**"After" view - restored
Venetian glass vanity
mirror frame.**

require abrasion with a sandblasting airbrush or an application of a dull glaze coating. If a design is missing, it may be reproduced by hand, using a frosted material fill or a chemical etching process. Some chemical etching can be duplicated by stencil to ensure exact design detailing.

The use of synthetic glass is helpful in the art of restoration. However, it does have a few drawbacks. Synthetic glass can't always be as durable as the original glass surface. Therefore, it should not be used in the same way. Sometimes, harsh cleaning can scratch or cloud synthetically applied areas. Pieces made of synthetic glass should be handled with care and used for decorative purposes only. Sometimes, antique glass replacement parts can be located as an alternative. It is possible to ask a glass blower to create some new parts as well.

Care should be taken to avoid displaying in direct sunlight, severe temperature changes, drafty or humid areas, and high traffic areas that create vibrations. Stains can be avoided by not allowing liquids to remain on the object for extended periods of time. Most specialized cleaning methods would require an experienced restoration specialist.

Some stains can be removed with the application of various acid chemical solutions. A gentle cleaning can be obtained with the use of a soft loading brush and rubbing alcohol. This is an almost dry cleaning effect due to its evaporation. It is therefore helpful to prevent damage to surfaces such as handpainted designs and fragile gold leaf.

Time, experience, science and the innate talent of the restoration specialist has made it possible to restore Venetian glass frames that once would have been discarded. The next time you have a mishap with your piece, it may be a good idea to get a qualified opinion before you throw it away.

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