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EDEN WORKSHOPS

A BOOKBINDERS RESOURCE



Thank you for taking an interest in this Book Arts E-book published by myself, Richard Norman of the Eden Workshops here in our home in South West France.

Several other e-books and manuals on the subject of the Book Arts and Gilding in particular are available for free download from the Eden Workshops website.

<http://www.edenworkshops.com>

For nearly 20 years my wife Margaret & I ran a system of craft workshops devoted to the exploration of the Book Arts.

During that time we worked in almost total isolation and seclusion in the grounds of a very private monastery in rural England. As you may imagine we learnt a great deal about the Book Arts during our tenure.



In 1997 we were nominated National Living Treasure by Country life Magazine for our collective contributions to the Book Arts. At the comparatively young age of 43 I considered this an honor I received on behalf of all those who had inspired me and taught me over the years.

A few years ago we closed our workshops and studios on a high note, and I took early retirement out here in rural South West France with my dear wife and beloved daughter Eden.

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A Simple Four Step Method of Gilding onto Leather.

Gilding, to the uninitiated, can seem at best a complicated affair and at worst an impossible skill to master.

I hope this simplified method of gilding onto leather will help those starting out as bookbinders, or anyone who wants to know how to gild onto leather.

I bit my teeth on the English method of gilding which was made complicated by paste washes and the mixing of egg albumen glair which was better when it had began to go off and started to smell terrible, the person who taught me, complicated things still further, with tooling all the designs in blind and then going over them with gold leaf afterwards, it really was a fraught business though undeniably this method does produce outstanding results when mastered.

I was very happy therefore to discover a method the French had been using for centuries as it bypassed one or two of the steps used in English gilding without any loss of effect

Below is a picture showing what equipment you will need.



- 1 Finishing Stove or hotplate**
- 2 Gilders Cushion & Gilders Knife**
- 3 Gold Leaf**
- 4 BS Glair (more of this later)**
- 5 Pumice powder**
- 6 Lint Free Cotton Wool**
- 7 White Spirit or Turpentine**
- 8 Vaseline**
- 9 All books to be gilded**
- 10 Finishing Press**

A few words about the equipment needed.

A proper finishing stove is ideal, but you can also use a simple single electric hotplate with a thermostat, these are available from many hardware stores.

A gilders pad is made from a piece of good quality, thick leather stretched over a wooden block with the flesh side uppermost, underneath the leather is a pad of cotton wool about 1/4 of an inch thick. A gilders knife can be an old kitchen knife with the front of the blade ground off at an angle, it should not have a razor like edge, rather it should be coarsely sharpened, rather like sharpening it on the kitchen step!

A few words about materials needed.

To use this method of gilding you will need to use a shellac based glaire known as BS glaire.

Pumice powder is used to degrease the gilders cushion and the gilders knife, a material called Bath Brick used to be used for this but I believe it is no longer available.

A finishing press or some small wooden press is needed to hold the books to be gilded.

I have found that the best time to gild (for me) is first thing in the morning, you need to be fresh and alert, make sure you have time enough to do the job properly, when successful, gilding is extremely satisfying, when it fails you can feel pretty frustrated, so give yourself the best chance of success.

Preparation for gilding



Using the gilders knife, scoop out a little of the pumice powder and deposit it on the cushion. Binders used to use a type of brick which they scraped powder from to degrease the cushion, but this type of brick is now either impossible to find or very expensive indeed, thus I have used fine grade pumice powder for many years as an inexpensive substitute.



Next, spread the pumice over the face of the cushion, and wiping the knife back and forth distribute the pumice over the cushion, making sure that the knife gets wiped several times to remove any traces of grease from it; then with the knife, brush of all the surplus pumice.



Having gathered all the books together that you wish to gild, take one and place it in the finishing press with about an inch of the book sticking out of the press as shown above.

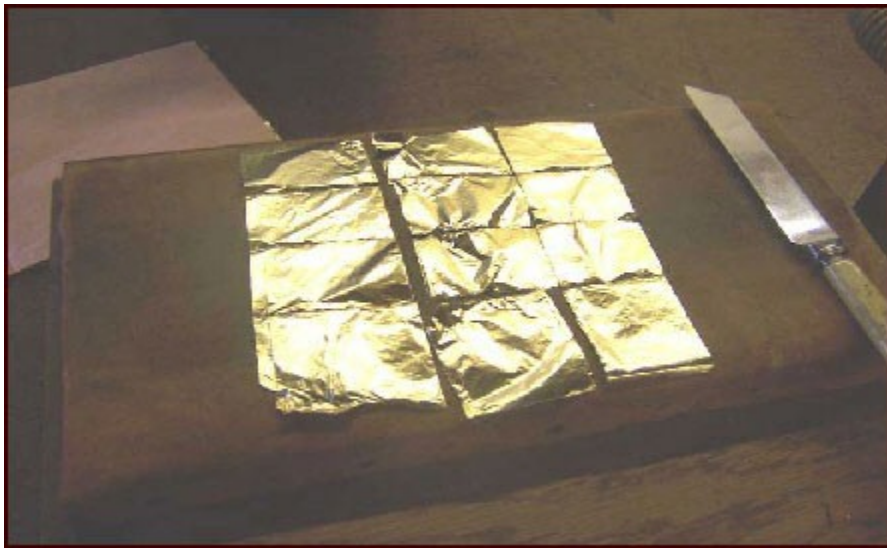
Using a small pad of cotton wool, dip the pad into the glair and gently wipe over the areas of the book that you wish to gild. If you are too vigorous in this, the glair will froth a little causing small bubbles to form, not really a problem as they will disperse soon enough. Now, and this is very important, leave the book for 24 hours before you start gilding, act too soon after applying the glair and you will get inferior results, or it will not work at all. Remember...*leave for 24 hours after applying the glair.*



When you are ready to gild, place the book of leaf on the cushion, open the book and slide your *grease free* knife under the middle of a leaf as shown above.



Turning the knife upwards, carefully lift the leaf up so that it drapes over the edge of the blade. Note that the slightest draft will send your leaf floating across the room, so close all the windows, put the cat out, and even hold your breath while doing this.



Lay the sheet of leaf down onto the cushion, and using the knife, cut the leaf up into squares wide enough to fit over the spine of the book, if you are tooling the whole spine, if not, then cut the leaf up into pieces big enough to cover the parts of the book you intend to gild) Watch your breathing at this stage, just a puff of breath will send these pieces of leaf flying in all directions.



Gather together a small amount of cotton wool and push it into a tight pad.



Place a little Vaseline on the back of your hand and using the cotton wool pad, with a circular motion distribute the Vaseline over the back of your hand.



Using the pad, carefully wipe over the areas of the book you wish to gild, making sure that only a thin coat is applied, you do not want to see *any* concentrations of Vaseline on the book. If you are not careful, concentrations of Vaseline can accumulate around the bands, make sure you avoid this. The Vaseline will cause the leaf to adhere to the area to be gilded so only a thin film is required, any more than that and it will make a mess of the gilding for sure.



Now, using a new cotton wool pad, dab it on the back of your hand to pick up a little grease. The basic idea is to have enough grease on the pad so that it picks up the leaf, but that you have more on the book, so that the leaf when applied to the book will stick to it, rather than to the pad.



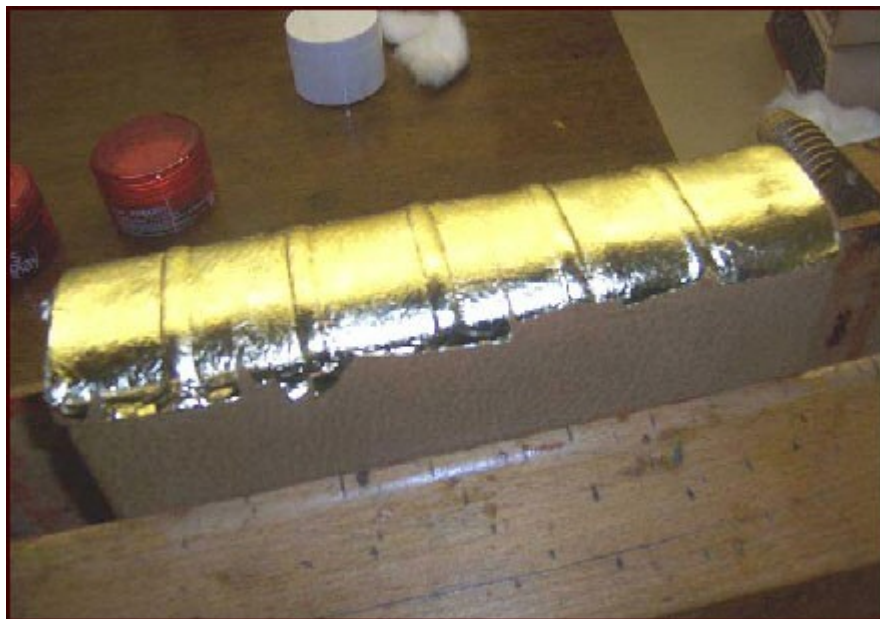
Still watching out for drafts of air, transfer the piece of leaf on the cotton wool pad to the area of the book to be gilded and gently lay the leaf down and press lightly, if you press too hard, or move the pad as you are laying the leaf down you run the risk of the leaf breaking up on the book, in which case you will have to lay more leaf over the broken areas...not a disaster, just more work and more leaf, you can lay one layer of leaf upon another without any problem, but not too many layers. Care will give the best results in the first place.



All things being equal, the leaf should adhere to the book as the book has more grease on it than the pad had, remove the pad and the leaf should be stuck in place, as shown above.



Continue to pick up pieces of leaf and stick them to the areas to be gilded until you have covered all the areas that you wish to gild.



Here you can see the spine of the book completely covered in leaf. I plan to do a full gilt back on this book, so I have covered the entire spine in leaf, obviously if you wished to just include center designs between the panels of the spine and gilt lines across the back you would not need to lay leaf over the whole of the spine, just those particular areas you wished to gild.



Now we come to another very important area of gilding...the temperature of the tools. To be precise a temperature of between 250 and 260 degrees Fahrenheit will do the job, to put it another way, using a Cockerel finishing stove like this one, the simmer setting is just right, bring the tools up to the simmer temperature and they are ready to use.

Perhaps the easiest method of judging when the temperature is right is to use this method.

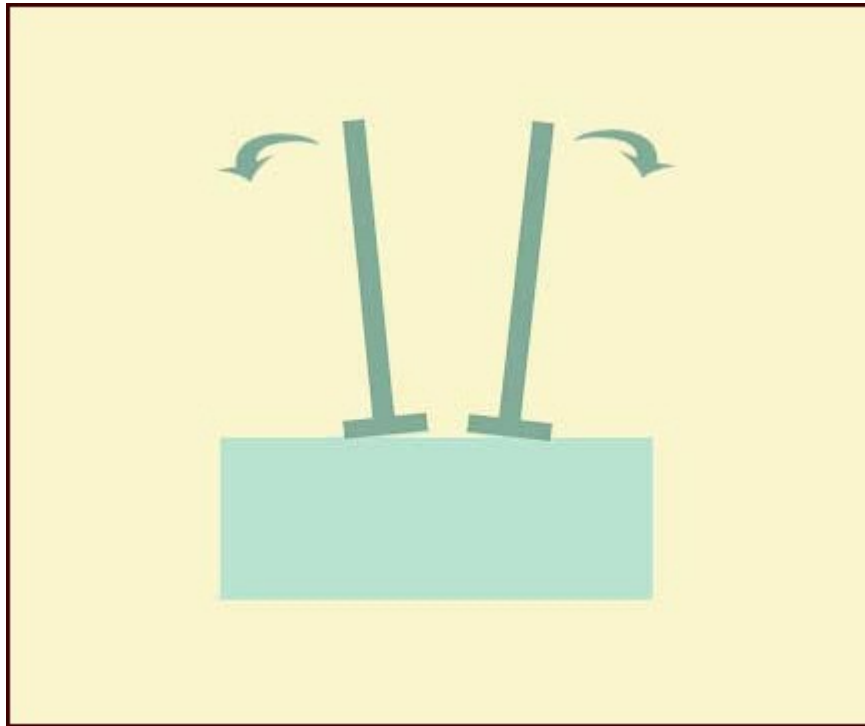
Wet your finger and apply the moisture to the end of the finishing tool, what you are looking for is for the moisture to quickly evaporate before your eyes...if the moisture sizzles it is a little too hot, remember we are looking for the moisture to just quickly evaporate...not sizzle away, no bubbles should form...the moisture should just quickly fade away.

That is the right temperature for gilding using this method with a spirit based glaire.

To cool hot tools down you need a saucer with a thick pad of cotton wool, or soft cloth, saturated with water.



When you are happy that your tools are at the right temperature, carefully sight the tool into the position you want to apply it on the book, If you are using a center tool as I am, bring the tool down squarely on the spot you want to gild and quickly break into a rocking movement, which rocks the tool North, South, East & West. The diagram below attempts to demonstrate this movement. In all the tool should not be in contact with the book for more than a couple of seconds. If the resulting image looks fuzzy or blurred that is an indication that you spent too long in contact with the book (or your tool was too hot).



Often the face of a center tool will be slightly concave, by rocking the tool back and forth and from side to side makes sure that the whole of the face of the tool comes into contact with the leather. You do not need to use this technique if you are using a pallet or fillet to make lines across the back of the book.

It may be worth pointing out that there are three elements to consider when applying the tool to the book.

Heat: The temperature of the tool.

Dwell: The amount of time spent in contact with the book.

Pressure: The amount of pressure you exert onto the tool.

If you gild using a slightly cooler tool then you may spend longer in contact with the book, but these are fine points.

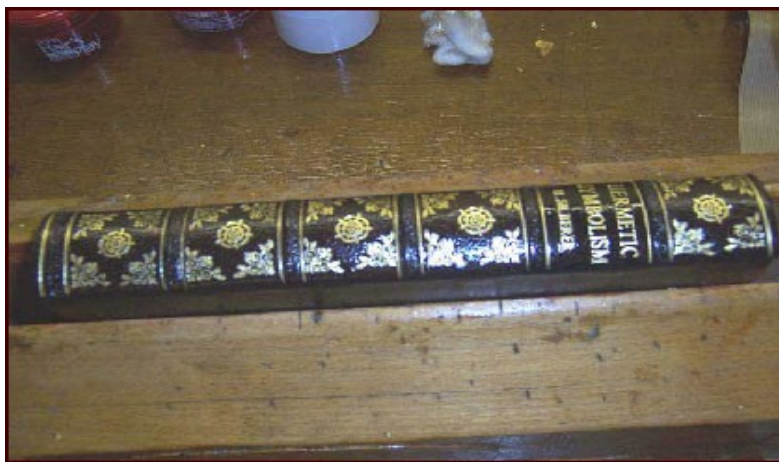


Having tooled all the areas of the book that were required, get a small pot of white spirit and dip a pad of cotton wool into the spirit, squeeze out most but not all of the spirit and wipe of the surplus leaf with the pad, do not rub the pad over the leaf, rather wipe over an area, remove the leaf, and then using a fresh part of the pad, wipe another area and so on, as shown below.



And below is the result, if the temperature of your tools is right the glair will do the job for you, it is essentially acting as a heat activated adhesive, the heat from the tool being the catalyst.

And remember, we used no paste washes, neither did we tool the designs in blind first, gilding in it's simplest form!



Some common problems

The gold does not stick after tooling, but gets wiped off when removing the surplus leaf with white spirit.

This is caused by the tools being too cold to activate the spirit based adhesive, increase the heat of the tools being used. Also make sure that the tool is being kept in contact with the leather for a few seconds, too little time spent in contact will result in the adhesive not getting enough heat to be activated.

The gold sticks in places but in others it looks messy and broken.

This may be caused by two things, firstly your tools are too hot and they are causing the glair to rapidly oxidize and blacken. Too much heat will cause the leather to blacken. Secondly, make sure you have not applied too much Vaseline, when the hot tool comes into contact, the Vaseline will melt and cause a mess.

If you still have problems I would be happy to lend a hand.

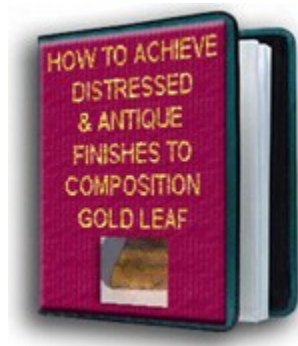
email: Richard edenworkshops@orange.fr

And don't forget we supply a very nice gilding box and accessories, it comes with a nice quality gilding pad, gilders knife, agate burnisher, pumice powder and a book of imitation gold leaf which you can use to practice with. You can find it [here](#). Please note the boxes are now made from pear wood, so are a lighter colour.



<http://www.gold-vault.com>

Of interest to many craftspeople may be my recently published manual concerning how to achieve distressed and antique finishes using composition gold leaf



Some involve quite complicated four part lacquers including the use of micro crystalline powder that add sparkle and iridescence to the finishes.

Some are very simple to attain needing only one or two coats with a varnish brush to achieve.

Here are just two examples of the types of finish you can achieve using this illustrated manual which contains all the complete recipes and methods we used to achieve these effects and finishes.



<http://www.gold-vault.com>