

Summary Article: **gilding**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Application of gilt (gold or a substance that looks like it) to a surface. From the 19th century, gilt was often applied to ceramics and to the relief surfaces of woodwork or plasterwork to highlight a design.

**Gilding ceramics** The gold layer can be created in a number of ways. From 1853 until the late 1860s, **brown gold** – a mixture of gold chloride, bismuth oxide, and borax – could be painted on ceramics to produce a dull golden surface when fired. It could then be polished. With **design transfers**, more intricate patterns could be used. The transfers were printed in ink containing asphalt, oil, and gold size (a gluey mixture) over gold leaf. This was applied on a coating of isinglass painted over glaze. **Liquid gold**, which was seldom used before 1850, allowed brilliant decoration, but it depended on the ability of oils containing sulphur to dissolve gold and hold it in suspension, so often the results were short-lived. **Fire gilding**, developed in the late 18th century and still in use, employs an amalgam of powdered gold painted over glaze. **Acid gilding** allows areas of matt and brilliantly polished surfaces. Acid applied to the surface of ceramics leaves the rest of the surface slightly raised, so when the whole is gilded and burnished, the acid-etched areas remain unpolished.

**Gilding with thin strips** In Japan, a technique of applying gold leaf cut into fine strips (*kirikane*) was developed, reaching its peak in the 12th century. It gives a different quality of line from painting with powdered gold, and was much used to decorate Buddhist sculptures and other works of art.

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