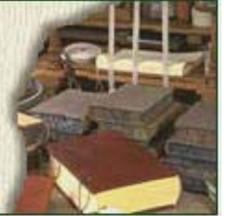




COUNTRY
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EDEN WORKSHOPS

A BOOKBINDERS RESOURCE



Hello, my name is Richard Norman

For nearly 20 years my wife Margaret & I ran the Eden Workshops 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. We developed four book related skills; hand book binding, paper marbling and book edge marbling, printing & box making and took those skills to high levels of excellence.

In 1997 after nearly 20 years running the Eden Workshops we were voted a National Living Treasure by Country Life magazine for our contribution to the Book Arts.



In 2004 we decided to close our workshops and move out here to Southern France, I now concern myself with teaching and have the time to concentrate on aspects of the book arts that interest me.

I have been approached by several people who have asked me to advise them with regard a starters pack for novice and aspiring binders, I am only too happy to provide this service, just ask.

I also provide a block making service to book binders at prices about four times lower than that charged for making blocks in brass.

I have published several manuals concerned with the book arts and will be releasing more very shortly, all these manuals can be found on my website and are free to download, here is a list of current and forthcoming manuals free to download from <http://www.edenworkshops.com>



A Simple Step by Step Method of Gilding onto Leather.

I would greatly appreciate any feedback with regard this manual please do tell me if it has been of help, or if you think anything could be added that would be of help to other would be gilders.

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Gilding, to the uninitiated, can seem at best a complicated affair and at worst an impossible skill to master. I bit my teeth on the English method of gilding which was made complicated by paste washes and the mixing of egg albumen glair. The person who taught me was a distinguished expert, I have taken all he taught me and tried to simplify the process so that a novice will have a reasonable chance of getting a good result.

I have come to use composition gold leaf and this is used throughout this tutorial, composition leaf looks very much like gold leaf but costs a fraction of the price, and also look far more convincing than regular gold foil.

Composition gold leaf comes in a variety of shades, I use and sell the one that is closest in appearance to 23 carat gold leaf.

Below is a picture showing what equipment you will need.



- 1 Finishing Stove
- 2 Gilders Cushion & Gilders Knife
- 3 Gold Leaf (Note I am using composition leaf)
- 4 BS Glair (see note concerning glair)
- 5 Pumice powder
- 6 Lint Free Cotton Wool
- 7 White Spirit or Turpentine
- 8 Thin Lacquer (Bookbinders varnish is fine)
- 9 Vaseline
- 10 All books to be gilded
- 11 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, I have also used a paraffin stove with a long metal chimney and rested the tools on the top, this works fine too.

A gilders pad is made from a piece of good quality thick (3mm) leather stretched over a wooden block, 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!

I use composition leaf for many bindings, I use it instead of gold leaf on cheaper books, you do need to give the gilded areas a thin coat of shellac to seal it so that it does not tarnish with age, but it is so much cheaper than 23 carat leaf and looks just as convincing...as you will see.

Note Concerning Glair

You have two choices when it comes to the glair (adhesive) you use when gilding onto leather. The first is the method of beating up the whites of eggs in order to extract the egg albumen used for gilding, you can also purchase dried egg albumen.

Or you can use a shellac based adhesive, there are two currently on the market, one is known as BS glaire and is spirit based, the other is JHS glaire and is water based, the JHS glair has the advantage of being free from fumes which irritate some people.

Both types of shellac size have the advantages of being easy to apply with a brush or cotton wool pad, I am currently using the JHS glaire and it is this glaire that is available from the site.

Most book binders develop a preference for one sort of size or another, I did use egg albumen for many years but went over to a shellac based size due to it's more flexible attributes.

You can obtain this glaire at my website by clicking [here](#).

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. There are some excellent quality press's which can be found at;

<http://www.edenworkshops.com>

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 off all the surplus pumice.

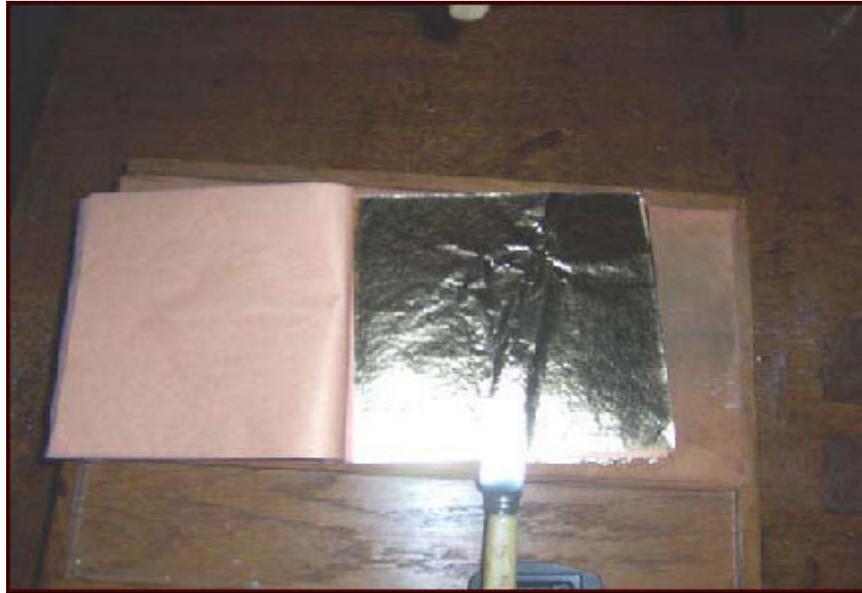


Having gathered all the books together that you wish to gild, take one and place it in the finishing press with about an inch of the book sticking out of the press as shown above.

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 may 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, this is necessary whether you use the glair I make or use any other spirit based glair, 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.*

No need to leave the book in the press, after applying the glaire it can be removed while you glaire up other books or use the press for some other job. One of the nice things about this glaire is that you can

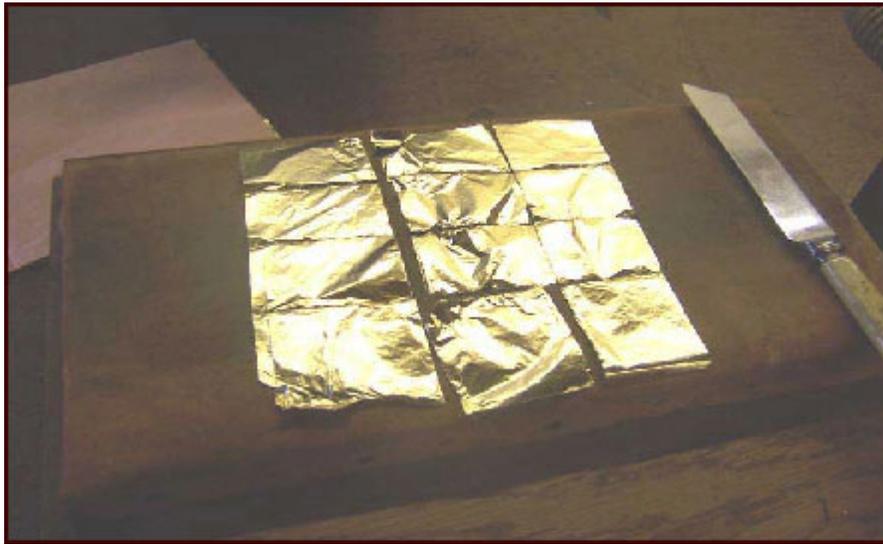
come back long after applying the glaire and work with it straight away, it does not deteriorate over months at a time.



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 the leaf 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 pad with a circular motion distribute the Vaseline over the back of your hand, the idea being to get a pad with an even *thin* coating of Vaseline on it.



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 clean pad of cotton wool, wipe it down the side of your nose, across your forehead or through your hair, the idea is to pick up a little grease, not as much as is on the book, but just enough so that when you touch one of the pieces of leaf the slight amount of grease will cause the leaf to stick to the pad as shown above. If you have dry, non greasy skin or you are for example bald, then you could...with care...apply just a trace of Vaseline to the cotton wool pad. 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

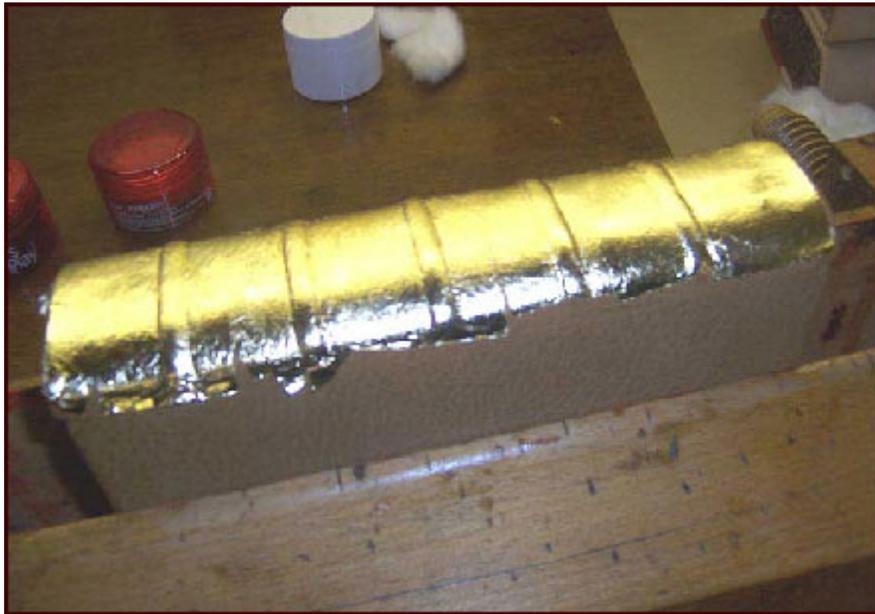
one layer of leaf upon another without any problem, but not too many layers please. Care will give the best results in the first place.



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.

Ensuring your lettering is square on a curved spine can be a problem; here is a tip that will help you with this factor of gilding.

Here you can see the spine of a book which has had the leaf applied to the area to be lettered.



Cut yourself a length of thin twine, cotton thread is ideal, I am using a thicker thread for the purposes of illustration. Wind the twine around your fingers as shown in the picture below and use your other fingers as a guide and to hold the thread square to the book as shown in the picture.



Try sliding your fingers up and down the sides of the book for practice, the thread should stay square to the spine of the book, do this a few times to give you the feel of this exercise, then slide the thread over to where the leaf has been laid.



Sight the thread so that it is where you would like the top of your letters to be and then pull the thread down onto the leaf, give a slight sideways pull and you will find that the thread cuts through the leaf leaving a nice clean line which you can use as a guide when it comes to tooling in your lettering.



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.

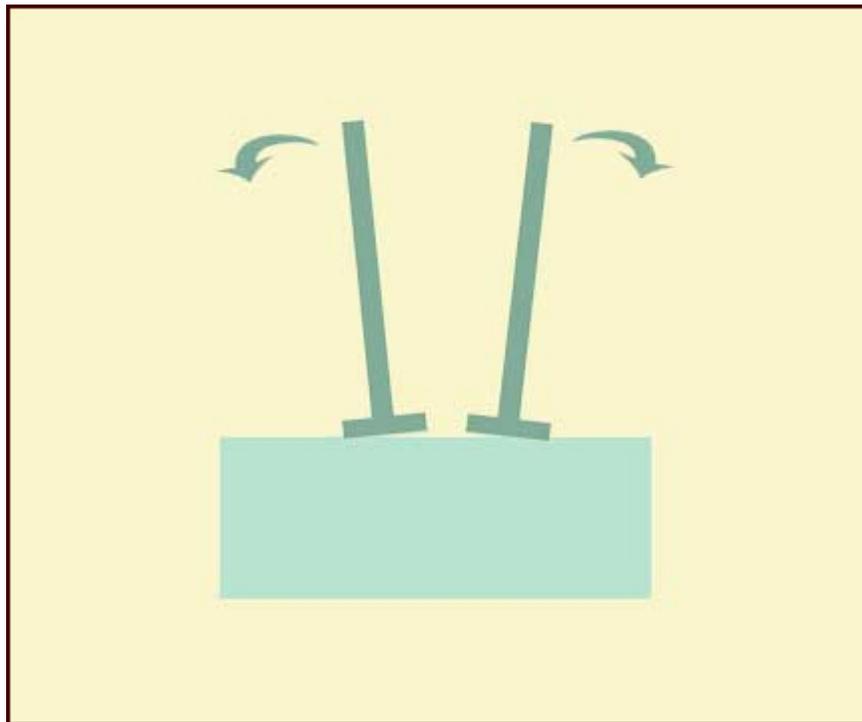
Perhaps the easiest method of judging when the temperature is right is to use this method.

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 to 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.



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.



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.

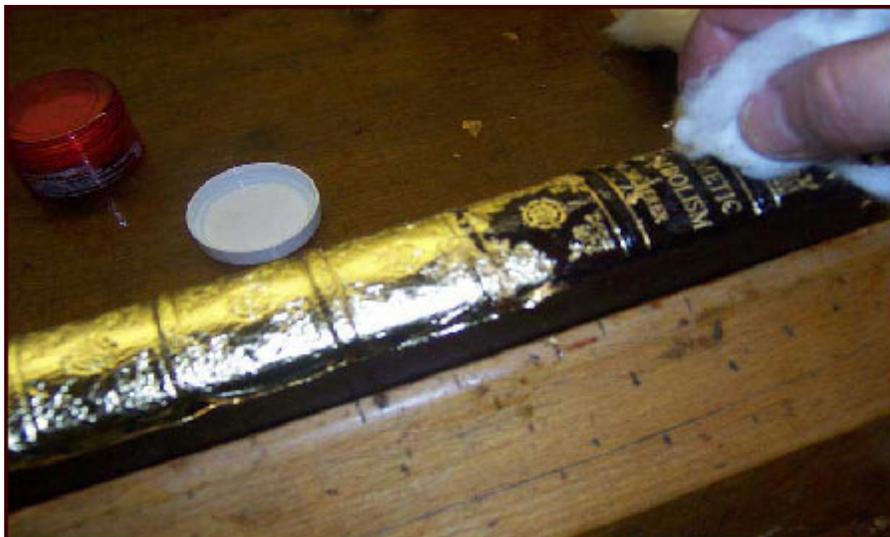
Dwell: The amount of time spent in contact with the book.

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. When it comes to carrying out lettering to the spine of a book a very good tip is as follows;



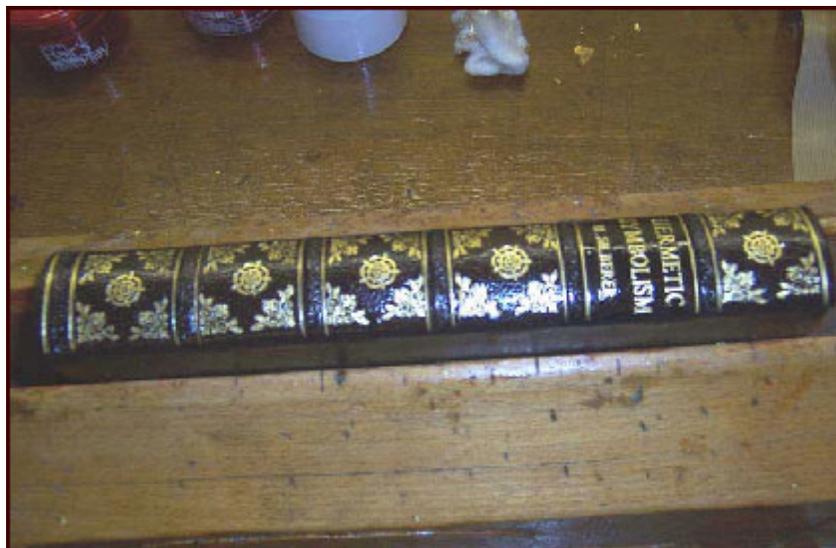
Having tooled all the areas of the book that were required, get a small pot of white spirit and dip a pad of cotton wool into the spirit, squeeze out most but not all of the spirit and wipe off the surplus leaf with the pad, do not rub the pad over the leaf, rather wipe over an area, remove the leaf, 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 or make card templates, gilding in it's simplest form.

However this manual is designed to give you a start and also give you a reasonable chance of success, when you have mastered this simple process perhaps you might consider getting the book on gilding by Mr. John Mitchell, I consider this man to be one of the very few experts in this field and his book will teach you the finer points of gilding.



Lastly, give the gilded area a thin coat of shellac, as shown below...J.Hewit & Sons Ltd make a leather varnish which is just right for this, it is slightly orange in colour and tints the gold very nicely and also seals the leaf from the atmosphere.



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, just mail me with the problem you are experiencing and I will help out.

email: richard.norman@cegetel.net

Finish

Advertisement



The Gold Vault is a new website solely devoted to achieving antique and other distressed finishes to gold leaf and composition gold leaf.

We explore the methods behind creating such finishes as this, our Standard Antique Finish.



We look at what we consider to be the most reliable and easy to apply crackle glazes available.



Applying gesso and obtaining distressed finishes like these is quite simple, we look at this technique in depth and show you that you do not need expensive equipment or materials to achieve these finishes.

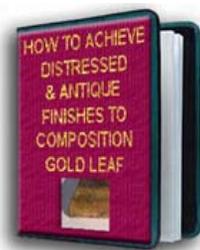


There are also Gilding Kits available which supply all the materials needed to achieve these finishes plus a comprehensive manual which talks you through the process's involved and is very fully illustrated.

This manual;

How to Achieve Distressed & Antique Finishes to Composition Gold Leaf

Is now available can be downloaded for free.



In this manual are the complete instructions for each of the kits we supply.

The manual is free to download [here](#).