

take a seat



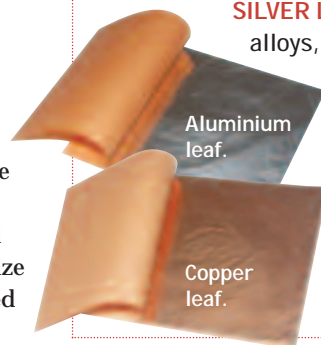
Create a classic masterpiece with easy gilding and upholstering techniques

MAIN PICTURE SIMON KENNY STYLING LOUISE OWENS
WORDS MARGARET-ANN HAMILTON

Gilding is the craft of applying thin layers of gold or silver leaf to a surface, and is known to date back as far as ancient Egypt.

Traditionally, the surface was prepared with layers of gesso, bole and rabbit skin glue. Today, gilding techniques remain the same, but the availability of acrylic gessos, boles and sizes make the job quicker, easier and less smelly.

Instead of gesso, this chair was sanded and coated with oil-based primer/sealer. To recreate the traditional clay bole finish, it was given a couple of coats of red oil-based paint. We used acrylic size to make the leaf stick, then topped it all off with aluminium leaf.



TAKE A LEAF

GOLD LEAF Gold purity is measured in carats. One carat is 1/24 purity by weight, so 24 carat is pure gold, 18 carat is 75 per cent gold, 12 carat 50 per cent gold, and so on. Gold leaf is generally 0.1 to 0.2 microns thick.

Gold can be alloyed with silver, copper and other metals. A high gold or copper content gives deeper tones. In lower leaf carats, gold is alloyed with silver or other metals for a lighter-coloured finish.

SILVER LEAF Pure silver, containing no gold or other alloys, 0.2-0.5 microns. Like all silver, it will tarnish.

COPPER LEAF Pure copper, 0.3-0.55 microns.
ALUMINIUM LEAF Pure aluminium, 0.4-0.8 microns.

DUTCH METAL LEAF Imitation gold leaf made from copper and zinc, 0.3-0.55 microns thick.

VARIEGATED LEAF Metal base, such as pure copper leaf or imitation gold leaf, and treated chemically to create colour patterns, 0.3-0.55 microns.



Variegated finish on a shell.

GLOSSARY FOR A GILDED TONGUE

BOLE is made from clay mixed with rabbit skin glue. Applied to a gesso surface then covered with gold leaf. The clay content determines the reflective quality of the gold finish. Clay is finer than gesso and becomes denser and more reflective when burnished.

BURNISH is to polish with friction to make a surface smooth and bright. Traditionally, agate is used, but a cotton glove or a soft, clean, lint-free rag can also be used.

GESSO is the Italian word for chalk

and is a powdered mineral calcium carbonate. Traditionally, gesso was mixed with rabbit-skin glue to make an absorbent primer coat for panel painting with tempera paints. Gesso creates a permanent and brilliant white substrate, and is used on timber or masonite.

MICRON is one-millionth of a metre, and the measure used to describe the thickness of metal leaf.

POUNCE uses a soft, round artist's brush with a dabbing action to work leaf into nooks, crannies or hollows.

RABBIT SKIN GLUE is just as the name implies and is glue made from rabbit skin and bones crushed to a powder. The glue is made by adding water and heating to activate the adhesive properties. It's an essential ingredient in traditional gilding and smells truly awful.

SIZE is the glue that sticks metal leaf to a surface. Water-based size dries quickly. Traditional oil-based size, such as Japan gold size, works best on hard, smooth surfaces, but takes longer to dry.



Skill rating



Sweat rating

Cost

DO IT YOURSELF
2 days \$99
HAVE IT DONE
1 day \$250

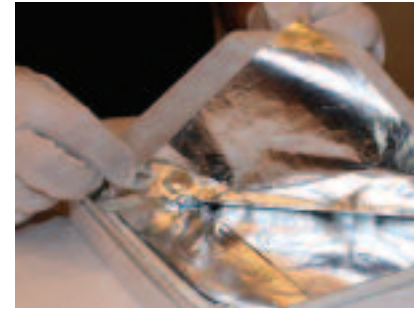
gild a dining chair



1 Prepare the chair
Sand lightly, then apply two coats of oil-based primer/sealer. When dry, apply two coats of oil-based gloss. Red is usually used as a base for gold, and black for silver, but either colour can be used.



2 Make the surface sticky
Apply the size in smooth, even strokes. It becomes tacky quickly as it dries. To test if the size is ready for the leaf, press a knuckle lightly on the surface – it's ready if it makes a clicking sound when you pull it away.



3 Handling the leaf
Metal leaf comes in squares interleaved with paper. Wear cotton gloves when handling to avoid tarnishing. Lift the leaf slowly, with as little contact as possible. Take care not to crumple, fold or tear the sheet.



4 Wrap on the leaf
Wrap a sheet around a leg of the chair. Continue to lay sheets of leaf, overlapping each slightly, down each leg.
TIP Ease the sheets onto the surface, rather than trying to position the whole sheet in one go.



5 Wrap the frame
Continue to wrap the leaf around the frame until it is entirely covered.
TIP Don't be concerned with the finish at this stage. It won't look smooth yet and should resemble a badly wrapped roast.



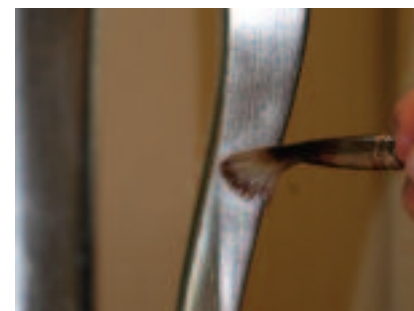
6 Smooth down the leaf
Use a soft, round artist's brush to pounce the leaf into nooks, crannies and hollows, using a dabbing action in a circular motion.



7 Burnish and fill the gaps
Rub a gloved hand gently over the frame to remove any surplus leaf. Use scrap pieces of leaf to fill any areas where the base coat shows through – just dab the scraps straight onto the size.



8 The final burnish
Use a gloved hand to give the frame a final rub-down for a glossy, reflective shine. It's really worth taking your time over this step. Patch any holes or gaps that you find with scrap leaf.



9 Protect the surface
Use a paintbrush to smooth shellac over the entire gilded surface. Work methodically to avoid missing any areas. Begin with the back of the frame and work down over the seat and legs.



GO TO GILDING SCHOOL

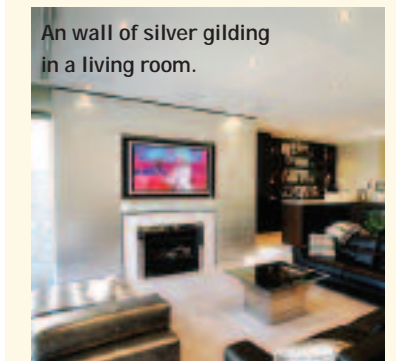
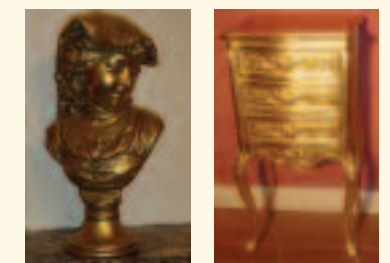
Art Gilding in Rosebery, NSW, was founded by master gilder Karl Eggert and his wife Brigitte, and is the only academy in Australia that offers certified master courses in gilding.

Together with fellow craftsman John Collado, who gilded our chair, the Eggerts undertake a range of domestic and commercial jobs, adding sparkle to everything from sea shells and furnishings (such as the bust and commode below) to entire walls and ceilings, even church domes.

The Art Gilding Academy was launched in response to constant requests from people wanting to learn more about the craft. They run classes for everyone from absolute beginners to handy craftspeople.

To learn more, you could go to one of their free information evenings, to see the craft in action while sipping gilded wine and cheese – literally!

Call Brigitte on (02) 9663 3881 or visit www.artgilding.com.au.



An wall of silver gilding in a living room.

upholster a dining chair

To revive an old seat first revamp the chair frame then replace the cushioning



1 Out with the old
Cut away the old fabric and remove the wadding. Remove the screws, then take out any tacks or staples using a small flathead screwdriver.



2 Trim the wadding
Position the new wadding over the seat and trim to shape, allowing about 100mm extra around all the edges for stapling. **TIP** Buy wadding from an upholstery supplier or good craft store.



3 Fix the wadding
Beginning at the front of the seat, use a staple gun to attach the new wadding. **TIP** Stretch the wadding taut as you staple around the seat for a smooth finish.



4 Fix the fabric
Position the fabric on the seat and fix with large pins. Cut the fabric, adding a margin of 100mm all round. Begin tacking the fabric to the seat from the centre back, working right then left, positioning the tacks 10mm apart.



5 Tack and trim
Add a second set of tacks between the fixing tacks to hold the fabric smooth. Trim excess fabric with a sharp utility knife. **TIP** If the chair has a backrest, repeat the previous steps to replace the wadding and fabric.



6 Tidying up
Fix braid or fabric trim with upholstery glue, then tack in place. Begin at the back of the chair, working in 200mm sections. **TIP** When fixing braid to the backrest, begin at the lowest part where the join will be least visible.

PULL UP A CHAIR

FABRIC The end result will be as good as the quality of the fabric you use.

- Buy upholstery-quality fabric rather than regular fabric as it's more durable and stain resistant.
- The thicker and stiffer the fabric, the more difficult it is to work with. So if you haven't upholstered before, avoid using leather or suede.
- If the fabric is striped or patterned make sure it's aligned with the edge of the frame for visual effect.

OUR CHAIR We used 1.5m of Florence Broadhurst Curly Swirls, \$143 per metre, from Signature Prints www.signatureprints.com.au.



The end result belies the simplicity of the process.