

Contemporary Frames

Contemporary frames have little finishing beyond a simple rub to bring out the lay lines of the gold. Shown here is a rub that is rather heavy.



Gilding an American contemporary frame is the most difficult gilding you will ever do. It can also be the most gratifying. When we replicate this style of frame, we don't do any distressing or antiquing or finishing because these frames are much newer than, for example, Italian or Spanish or French frames that we replicate. This means that your gilding must be clean and perfect. You'll find that you'll need to use a few different techniques when working on contemporary frames to make that possible.

Silk Corners

To keep the corners flawless on our contemporary frames, we cover them with a very fine silk (one that has a close weave). Apply the silk before you apply the gesso to help disguise the joint in the corners. This will also help to alleviate the stress on the corners of the frame over time and prevent cracked gesso in the corners.

Make sure the silk you use is unsized (you don't want to introduce a foreign chemical to your frame). If you are unsure, wash the silk in water and dry it (both by hand).

To wed the silk to the surface of your frame, cover the corner of the frame with rabbit skin glue. Place a square of silk on the corner, and then put more glue on

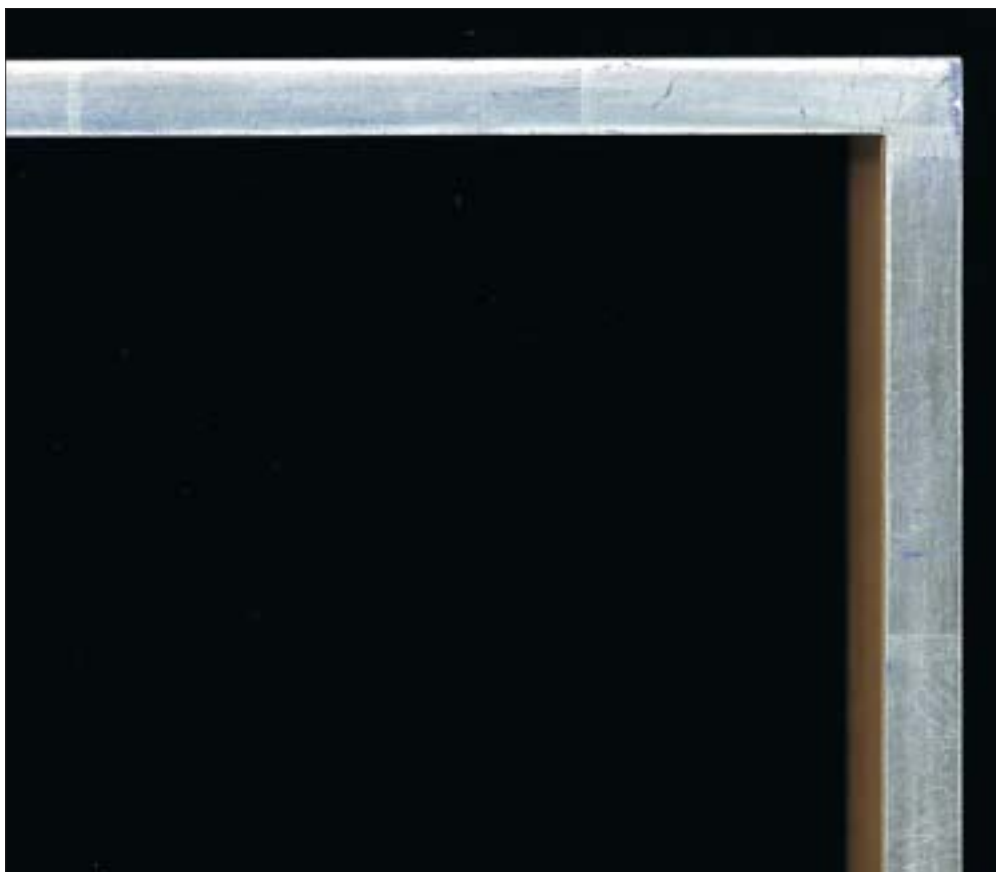
top of the silk, saturating it. Once the glue penetrates the silk, it will be as if the wood and the silk are one continuous surface. When the glue and the silk have dried, trim the silk square to the exact size of the corner of the frame.

You can also use a facer spline to completely eliminate the corner joint. Be sure to use the same type of wood for the spline that you used to make the frame.

Preparing the Surface and Laying The Leaf

When gilding contemporary frames with white (12 karat) gold, we have found that this type of gold (really an alloy of gold and silver) needs a stronger glue mixture in our clay otherwise the gold will reject the clay surface. We also increase the amount of glue we use in our gilder's liquor, but not by much. (Remember, too much glue in your liquor will stain the gold.)

We have also found that it's helpful to use a little more petroleum jelly when gilding with white gold than with yellow gold (again, not much!). It makes the leaves easier to pick up on your tip. And although I usually cut yellow gold with my fingernail and recommend this to my students, white gold should be cut with a gilder's knife because it is so much heavier.



For this frame we used a lighter rub. The lay lines are barely visible.

Be careful when you begin to gild the frame. Each leaf must be laid down exactly right. You can't patch a contemporary frame—it would be too obvious—so any mistake entails washing off that leaf from the frame and regilding that area. When you're about to place the leaf on the frame, it is important to make sure you get the gilder's liquor about $\frac{1}{8}$ " under the previous leaf. Then overlap each leaf when you place it by that same $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Continue this rhythm all the way around the frame.

To make each leaf of gold look even and straight, we pull out the leaf after we have placed it on the frame. It takes a lot of skill and practice for this to be expertly done. You must gently pull the leaf with your fingers, making sure not to pull so hard that you tear it.

If you find that an air bubble has been trapped under the gold on the frame, you need to blow out that bubble. If you can't, wash that leaf off of the frame. Once that leaf is gone, saturate the area with gilder's liquor. Then drop a new leaf into that spot. It's not easy, but there's no other way to get the perfect gilding you

need for a contemporary frame. If you find you're really in trouble, you might want to consider washing the gold off the entire leg of your frame and then re-gild it.

Finishing the Frame

The only finish you'll give to your contemporary frame is a rub with lacquer thinner and whiting. This is just a light rub to emphasize the lay lines of the frame.

To create this illusion, take whiting and lacquer thinner and mix them together until the mixture has the consistency of heavy milk. Paint this paste onto the surface of your frame, let it dry, and then wipe it back with a cotton ball (use only 100% cotton). The paste will dry very quickly, so move fast. Repeat this process until you achieve the rub you want. You can also leave your frame clean; no lay lines, just a solid bar of gold.

You'll seal your frame with clear lacquer. It's tough, hard, and shiny; the perfect sealer for a contemporary profile. (You can also use shellac, but it will dull the finish somewhat.)



Glue the square of silk to your frame, then trim the excess.



You want to eliminate any folds or wrinkles, but not shift the placement of the leaf.



Each leaf must be put on the frame exactly right.



A final pull on either side assures the leaf is smooth.



Be careful whenever you touch the leaf when you pull it out—you don't want to tear the gold.



Wipe off the whiting and lacquer thinner paste with a cotton ball.