

How to Antique A Brass Plaque

By Marc Lizer, CPF

A brass plaque is often added to the framing package to either inform the viewer or simply to add to the decorative effect. However, on items for which a vintage look is desired, a shiny brass object is only a distraction in a good design. There is a way to make what is “new” look “old” and solve this problem. It is surprisingly easy and you will be able to control the level of patina achieved.

Materials

The materials you’ll need are an oxidizing agent and a steel wool pad. You can buy the oxidizing agent at brass plaque supplier, a finer hobby shop, a specialty paint store, or a metal working shop. (We’ve also included a recipe to make your own here.)

The Process

Once you’ve gathered these materials, place the brass plaque, with its oxidized letters and protective coat, on your work surface. Next, use the steel wool to remove the protective varnish (see Photo 3). In Photo 4, the left side of the plaque still has the protective coat, while the right side has been brushed with the steel wool. Once all the varnish is removed, the plaque will appear



Photo 1: Brass oxidizer

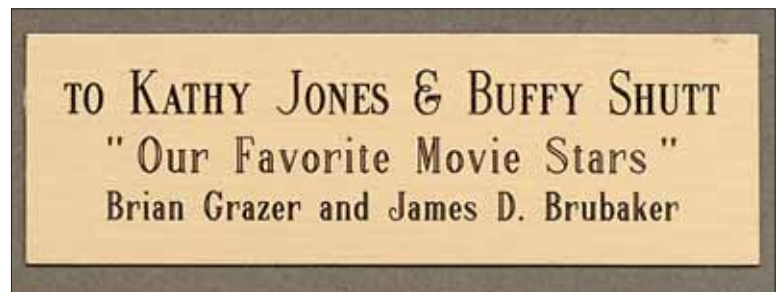


Photo 2: Regular brushed brass with oxidized letters and protective coat (which prevents tarnish).



Photo 3: Remove the protective varnish with a steel wool pad.



Photo 4: Here is the plaque with half of the protective varnish removed (on the right).

How to Antique A Brass Plaque

to be even shinier and brighter (see Photo 5), but it would tarnish over time.

Now's the time to apply the oxidizing agent (see Photo 6). Once the agent is applied, let the plaque sit for five to 30 seconds for a nice effect. The result will be a tarnished plaque (see Photo 7). The longer you leave it on, the darker the plaque will become, but that doesn't matter because the steel wool pad will take off as much of the tarnish as you wish. Use a steel wool pad to remove the tarnish until you achieve the desired sheen (see Photo 8). And there you have an antiqued brass plaque to enhance your framing design.

Alternative Process

If you cannot find an oxidizing agent or would like to try making your own, there is a recipe for brass antiquing which you can use. The ingredients are: 1 cup distilled water; 1 tablespoon of trisodium phosphate (TSP); and ½ teaspoon liver of sulfur.

First, wash the item that will be antiqued with lacquer thinner to remove any coatings. Heat the water to boiling, and stir in TSP. Pour the solution into a glass container and add liver of sulfur. Using a tool made of non-metallic material, dip the brass plaque into the solution for two to five seconds.

Check the color and keep dipping until desired darkness is achieved. Then rinse under cold running water and dry. As with the above process, rub the plaque with a steel wool pad until you reach the desired effect. Finally, seal with paste wax or a misting of aerosol lacquer. ■



Photo 5: All the varnish has been removed. The brass now seems even shinier.



Photo 6: Apply the oxidizing agent and let sit for five to 30 seconds.



Photo 7: Oxidizing agent has been applied and has tarnished the plaque.



Photo 8: The tarnish has been removed with the steel wool pad.



Photo 9: Before and After: On the left, the plaque still has the protective coat. On the right, the plaque has been given an antique finish.