

Preservation Practices



by Hugh Phibbs

Another Gilded Fillet: The Half Round

Last month we looked at a technique for making gilded flat and hollow fillets from conservation-quality board, acrylic paint, PVA glue, spackle, and metal leaf. This design creates the most common inner element found in historic frames and thus, can be used to complement many profiles. Another shape that is another popular for a gilded fillet is the half round. This, too, can be made from conservation-quality board, glue, acrylic paint, and metal leaf. The spackle can be omitted from the manufacture of this profile since it relies upon the shaping of the board itself to create

at least $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide, but can be as much as 1" wide if preferred. The inner face of the fillet will be butted along the edge of the base and can be $\frac{3}{16}$ " to $\frac{1}{4}$ " wide with a bevel running down one of its long sides.

The rest of the fillet will comprise two strips that will be $\frac{1}{8}$ " wide (to go with the $\frac{3}{16}$ " face) or $\frac{3}{16}$ " wide (to go with the $\frac{1}{4}$ " face). These two strips will sit on top of the base and, thus, will need to be $\frac{1}{16}$ " narrower than the face strip. One of these strips will be blunt cut on both sides, while the other will have a bevel running down one long edge. The length of these strips of board will depend on the dimensions of the board from which they are being cut, but it should be as long as is convenient so that it can be cut into the sizes needed without undue waste.

Once the strips have been cut, they can be glued together. Pure PVA glue will be strong enough and has a rapid enough tack to make assembly easy. Archival suppliers have this glue in pure forms and are beginning to offer it with added calcium carbonate that will complement the protection provided by the calcium carbonate in the conservation-quality board.

First, the beveled and unbeveled $\frac{3}{16}$ " wide strips should be glued together so that the wide side of the beveled strip is attached to the side of the unleveled strip. Once the glue is applied to one, they can be pressed together at one end and drawn along the surface of the work table with one hand while being pressed down between the thumb and forefinger of the

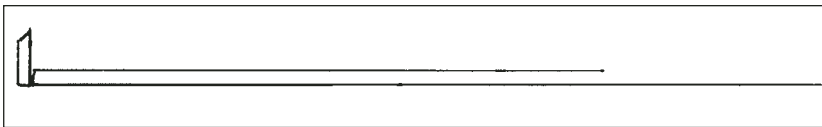


Figure 1: The unbeveled side of the combined strip rests on the support strip. It will be flush (and perpendicular) to one edge of the support strip

its rounded surface, rather than filling of hollows with spackle.

The most important thing when creating this fillet is to have a set of very accurately cut strips of board. The use of board shears may produce strips that vary in width along their length. The strips may be twisted and need to be massaged flat before they can be used. Strips with more even width and greater flatness can be made by trimming the edges off of a sheet of board with a firmly held straightedge. Since some of the strips required should have one of their long sides beveled, the edges of the sheet of board can be beveled with a mat cutter first.

In this design, there will be four types of strips needed. A base strip that should be

other hand. When they are dry, they can be glued to one side of the support strip so that the unbeveled side of the combined strip rests on the support strip. It will be flush (and perpendicular) to one edge of the support strip (see Figure 1).

When this is dry, the face strip can be glued so that it bridges the surface of the combined strips (see Figure 2). The overlapping construction of this design will ensure that the fillet will resist breakage during its cutting and installation into the window. If the bottom of the fillet is not flat (due to any variation in the widths of the strips from which it was assembled), it can be sanded flat at this point.

At this stage, the upper edge of the fillet should be formed of two beveled surfaces on either side of a flat one. These can be quickly shaped into a half round shape with a sheet of sandpaper. Since the fillet will be painted and gilded, any grit that the sandpaper may leave will not be able to come loose from the surface of the fillet.

The rounded portion of the fillet can then be given a coat of yellow ochre or raw sienna acrylic paint, which will serve as a base coat and strengthen the fibers. This should be

sanded once it has dried and can be given another, thinner coat of the paint if it needs to be smoother. Burnt sienna makes a good “bole” color and it can be thinned to a liquid and used to secure the metal leaf.

The fact that the leaf will show on the inner face (the rounded top) and the outer face of the fillet means

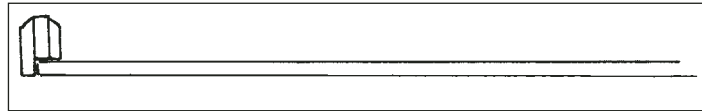


Figure 2: The face strip is glued to bridge the combined strips.

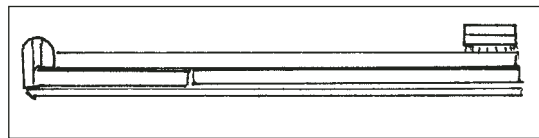


Figure 3: A spacer can be affixed to the outer edge of the window mat to compensate for the thickness of the fillet.

that, unlike the flat and hollow design, this fillet must have its leaf applied to each piece individually. The book of metal leaf can be cut to the desired width to provide the pieces of leaf. The acrylic is brushed onto the fillet and the leaf is laid onto the wet acrylic. Care should be taken that none of the paint extends onto the leaves that have been laid to avoid painted lap marks.

The fact that the leaf will impede drying means that the fillet must dry for at least 24 hours. When it is thoroughly dried, it can be burnished and sealed with a tone

coat of clear acrylic with a touch of raw umber and black. These fillets can be easily trimmed to size in a moulding chopper. Since the exposed portion of the board has its fibers running parallel to the direction of the chopping, it should not deform as it is cut.

The uppermost portion of the fillet will rise above the surface of the window mat. To avoid undue pressure on the art beneath, a spacer of board should be affixed to the outer edge of the window to compensate for the thickness of the fillet above the top of the mat surface (see Figure 3). Fill board will be needed around the back, outer edges of the fillet, and a backing mat should be added to cover the seams and glue.

The two types of fillets that have been described in this and last month's column allow for the creation of both concave and convex elements. These techniques can be combined with “steps” made of blunt cut strips of board, so that more elaborate profiles can be assembled. All of the materials used to make these fillets should be safe for preservation framing and the dilemmas involved with wooden fillets can be successfully avoided. ■