

# THE GOLD RUSH

To cover an ordinary object with gold is to transform it into something precious. As **ELLIE TENNANT** discovers, gilding is a practice as old as the discovery of gold itself and Christmas is the time to celebrate it

PHOTOGRAPHS **KATYA DE GRUNWALD**  
STYLING **ANNA MALHOMME DE LA ROCHE**

Going for gold - A great colour to decorate for Christmas, mix bold geometric patterns with your favourite antique pieces for an up to date look.

*Ever since man first found gold, it's been used to embellish and enhance objects of beauty. The ancient Egyptians were gilding tombs 4,000 years ago*

**Be bold-** A huge starburst gold gilt mirror is the perfect statement piece for any hallway and great for a last minute check before you head out for that Christmas party. **FACING PAGE** Feathery fronds- Give your banister an art deco update with these glittery fern sprigs, mixed with glittering gold berries and antique baubles.



The staff at Chatsworth in Derbyshire are busy putting the finishing touches to the Great Dining Room for Christmas. Apart from the strands of electric fairy lights, you'd be forgiven for thinking it's 1815 not 2015, and it's impossible to imagine a more spectacular seasonal scene – the fires are lit and sparkling crystal chandeliers hang above polished cutlery. Yet it's the intricate, golden flowers, scrolls and borders on the ceiling that effortlessly steal the show.

'Ever since man first found gold, it's been used to embellish and enhance objects of beauty,' says antiques dealer John Bly. 'The ancient Egyptians were gilding tombs 4,000 years ago and the method they used would have been the same as we use today.'

The earliest examples of European gilding are found in Catholic and Orthodox churches, symbolising divine presence and spiritual light. 'Gold is not a colour as such, it is of a different order of existence,' says Aidan Hart, painter and carver of sacred icons. 'It is used on traditional icons as the background for haloes to represent the glory of God shining from within.'

Gold has always imparted a sense of luxury, elevating royalty above the common man. 'Gold was not only a symbol of wealth but also of the sun, with its gleaming surface reflecting light and life,' says gilder Rupert Coke. The art of gilding is similar to that of veneering on timber – it's the enhancement of a cheap material with an expensive one. Wood, metal, glass and bronze are all transformed when an ultra-thin layer of gold is applied to their surface. It is this transformation that appeals to gilders like Coke. 'It's incredibly satisfying to restore a dull surface to gleaming bright gold,' he says.

#### Traditional techniques

There are three main types of gilding: water, oil and mercurial (or glass) gilding. Water-adhesive gilding is used on woodwork, plaster, furniture and interior ceilings. Oil gilding is for



metal and external surfaces such as railings, which require a waxy, linseed oil adhesive. Mercurial gilding has been phased out but involved applying a 6:1 mercury to gold amalgam to porcelain, copper or bronze, then firing it at 316C until the mercury evaporated, leaving the gold fixed firmly to the surface.

Few people know more about the water and oil gilding than expert Peter Hare, who co-founded Hare & Humphreys in 1987 and has since gilded many of the nation's finest buildings, including Chatsworth and the House of Lords. His impressive client list includes Elton John and the Queen, for whom the firm gilded the royal barge *Gloriana*.

'A single gold leaf is three-and-a-half inches square and so thin that if you touch it with your finger, you can't feel it and it will instantly turn to dust,' says Hare, rummaging through the shelves of his busy workshop, which are heavy with

## Decorating WITH GOLD

- **Spray paint allows you to create your own 'gilded' masterpieces.** Transform pine cones, wooden candlesticks, picture frames or inexpensive ornaments with Rust-Oleum metallic spray paint in gold (£9.49 per 400ml, Homebase).

- **Buy a few rolls of decorative gold wash masking tape** (£2.75 per roll, Fox & Star), and use them to create elegant golden lines, dado rails and panels on walls and doors. Alternatively, use the tape to decorate napkin rings, paper plates and tablecloths for a Christmas party.

- **Look out for damaged vintage gilded picture frames at flea markets and in charity shops.** Leave them empty and prop them against a wall for shabby-chic grandeur.



*Regency era porcelains by the likes of Coalport, Spode and Royal Worcester were often gilded*

rows of ornate plaster roses and resin eagles. ‘Gold comes in “books” with stitched cotton spines and tissue-paper pages, separating the loose gold leaf within. Each leaf of 23.5-carat gold (the half carat is silver and copper to make it more pliable) is worth about 50p. It’s not unusual for a ceiling project to use 25,000 individual sheets or more.’

Gilding is an ancient craft and is performed using reassuringly simple tools. ‘To lift gold leaf, you need static electricity,’ says Hare, as he lets a thin sheet ‘fly’ to his brush. ‘Soft sable (squirrel hair) brushes known as “tips” are used because they’re ultra fine. The leaves blow all over the place, so it’s very difficult to apply. You need a still

room with no breeze – and plenty of patience.’ Leaf is held on a pigskin ‘gilder’s pad’ and any ‘skewings’ (dust) are collected in a ‘skewing hat’ (a paper bag) to be pushed into crevices or collected and sold to a gold dealer. The gold is burnished with an agate stone shaped like a dog’s tooth.

It’s a messy job. Bly remembers an amusing incident when Goldsmiths’ Hall was being gilded during the hot summer of 1989. ‘Because of the heat, a young gilder had stripped down to the waist,’ he recalls. ‘His head and shoulders were glistening with flecks of gold. As he descended the scaffolding at lunchtime, the librarian was walking past. She looked up, saw him covered in gold

coming down from the heavens – and fainted. I think she retired soon after.’

**Extravagant interiors**

It was the building of the baroque Palace of Versailles (built 1624–98) that started the European trend for ostentatious gilded interiors, furniture and ornaments. French gilder Laurent Hissier recently helped to restore parts of the palace, including the Hall of Mirrors. ‘In 1689, Louis XIV had all of his silver furniture melted down to finance wars and replaced it with carved wooden, gilded pieces instead, which cost the equivalent of £100m at the time,’ he says. ‘There was a revival in gilding, which continued until Louis-Philippe I.’ It wasn’t long before rich people across Europe started to copy the ornate Versailles gilding. ‘The most striking imitation of Versailles is the Wilhelmshöhe in Kassel, Germany, which was built in 1786 by William IX.’

The English aristocracy was taking note, too. ‘Everybody wanted to be like the Sun King,’ says antiques expert Eric Knowles. ‘18th-century buildings such as Blenheim Palace (built 1705–22) and Castle Howard (building began in 1699 and took over 100 years to complete) are very much inspired by Versailles.’

Gilt-framed mirrors from the early part of the 18th century convey the baroque style, with asymmetrical decorations. By the late 1700s, gilded frames were more influenced by rococo style, with symmetrical designs, balanced shapes and nature-related reliefs.

Antique furniture shop Apter Fredericks has a stunning rococo gilt-wood mirror by George Cole of Golden Square – a fitting address for a gilder – in stock priced at £88,000. ‘The intricate carving includes conjoined “C” scrolls, trailing flowers and a pair of sheep,’ says Guy Apter. ‘This is a classic example of the lightness and movement one would expect from a rococo-period mirror.’

By the Regency era, neoclassical style was all the rage: round, convex, gilded mirrors with black ebony elements are typical of the early 1800s. ‘Regency era porcelains were often gilded,’ says Knowles. ‘Pieces by Coalport, Spode and Royal Worcester can sometimes look a bit dull but, remember, people ate by candlelight, which makes the gold come alive.’

‘The 19th century was a time when people were making huge amounts of >



**Paper decorations-** These huge decs are not only good fun but give your drinks areas instant party appeal. A gilt screen is perfect for hiding away any chairs for last minute guests and boxes of extra champagne. **FACING PAGE** Mix and match- Create a stunning and individual placesetting for your guests- mix different textures such as gold, gilt, shell, glass and place on a sumptuous velvet fabric.

*Gilding was particularly popular in the 19th century. If a person couldn't get hold of an original piece because it was in a museum, they would have it copied*

money in industry,' says antiques dealer Ian Butchoff. 'The upper middle classes wanted to emulate aristocracy, so they built grand homes and wanted grand furniture. Often, if a person couldn't get hold of an original piece because it was in a private collection or a museum, they would have it copied.'

Butchoff has a gilded *secrétaire à abattant* (writing desk), c1880, by Maison Rogié of Paris priced at £450,000. It is an exact replica of the original in the Wallace Collection, made in 1777 by Pierre-Antoine Foullet. 'Side by side, they look almost identical,' says Butchoff. 'The gilding is the same but the wood on the older example has faded slightly. Far from being cheap imitations, copies such as these were often better made than the originals, thanks to improved tools and better materials.'

#### Changing tastes

In the Georgian period, soft pastel colours with gold highlights were popular but, during the Victorian era, gilding fell out of fashion. Queen Victoria was in mourning for about 40 years after the death of Prince Albert, so darker, stronger pigments were favoured and garish gold somehow didn't seem appropriate for the nation's mood. 'Some families followed the lead of Queen Victoria's mourning and painted their gilded mirror frames black,' says Bly.

Eric Knowles says gilding wasn't popular during the art deco period, either. 'Silvering and black lacquering was more popular than gilding during this opulent era,' he says. 'When you do come across gilding, it tends to be used as flat square panels laid on lacquered panels Japanese-style, such as the ornate screens made by designer Jean Dunand (1877-1942).'

'At the turn of the 20th century, when modernism arrived, gilding fell completely out of fashion,' says Hare. 'Many of our galleries and museums were painted white or grey, and gilding was often covered with new ceilings. Today, when we restore a gilded scheme that's 200 or 300 years old, sometimes it has been painted over as many as 20 or 30 times.'

Citing the National Gallery and the Royal Academy as examples of buildings with glorious, reinstated gilding, Hare feels optimistic. 'Nowadays, people

want to view celebrated pieces of art in a beautiful, enticing environment,' he says.

Meanwhile, gilders agree that gold is particularly popular at the moment with Middle Eastern and Russian clients, who favour an opulent look, and 'Cherished Gold' is Dulux's 'colour of the year' for 2016. Post-recession, extravagance is gradually creeping back and bling is, once again, in.

Gilder Rupert Coke was recently commissioned to create a gilded wooden box (using gelatine and gold leaf) for chef Charlie Bigham's Swish Pie – the world's most expensive ready meal, which contains champagne and lobster and costs a staggering £314.16.

'There will always be somebody who wants to look rich,' says Bly. 'But I think that, even if gold were not so rare and expensive, we would still be drawn to it. Can you resist gold? I can't. It's beautiful.' ■



ABOVE All that glitters- Sparkly brooches make the perfect present adornment for that special someone. FACING PAGE Golden tones- Soft golden hues are great for a bedroom too- mix speckled wallpaper with art deco inspired bedlinen and tactile cream fur for a luxurious finishing touch.

## Find out more

### WHERE TO SEE

- \* **Blenheim Palace**, Woodstock, Oxfordshire, OX20 1PP. 01993 810530; blenheimpalace.com
- \* **Buckingham Palace**, London, SW1A 1AA. 020 7766 7300; royalcollection.org.uk
- \* **Chatsworth**, Bakewell, Derbyshire, DE45 1PP. 01246 565300; chatsworth.org
- \* **Goldsmiths' Hall**, Foster Lane, London, EC2V 6BN. 020 7606 7010; thegoldsmiths.co.uk/goldsmiths'-hall
- \* **Holkham Hall**, Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk, NR23 1AB. 01328 710227; holkham.co.uk
- \* **Strawberry Hill**, 268 Waldegrave Road, Twickenham, TW1 4ST. 020 8744 1241; strawberryhillhouse.org.uk

### WHERE TO BUY

- \* **Apter-Fredericks**, 265-267 Fulham Road, London, SW3 6HY. 020 7352 2188; apter-fredericks.com
- \* **Butchoff Antiques**, 154 Kensington Church Street, London, W8 4BN. 020 7221 8174; butchoff.com
- \* **John Beazor Antiques**, 78-80 Regent Street, Cambridge, CB2 1DP. 01223 335178; johnbeazorantiques.co.uk
- \* **Tarquin Bilgen**, 227 Ebury Street, London, SW1W 8UT. 020 7259 0111; tarquinbilgen.com

### WHAT TO READ

- \* **Art et Techniques de la Dorure à Versailles – Gilding at Versailles** (in French and English) by Laurent Hissier (Editions Vial, 2011)
- \* **Gold: Gilding History & Techniques** by Kirsten Beuster (Schiffer, 2008)
- \* **Looking at European Frames: A Guide to Terms, Styles and Techniques** by D Gene Karraker (Getty Publications, 2010)

### GILDERS AND CARVERS

- \* **Aidan Hart Sacred Icons** 07910 246774; aidanharticons.com
- \* **Carvers & Gilders**, Unit 44, Spaces Business Centre, Ingate Place, London, SW8 3NS. 020 7498 5070; carversandgilders.com
- \* **Hare & Humphreys**, 156-158 Gray's Inn Road, London, WC1X 8ED. 020 7833 8806; hare-humphreys.co.uk
- \* **Rupert Coke** 07980 214520; rupertcoke.com

# STYLIST'S NOTEBOOK

**1** Walls painted in Old White, £35 for 2.5 litres matt emulsion, Farrow and Ball. **Curtain** made in Moonbeam Copper, £93 per m Voyage Decoration. Alwinton sofa in Whitby Ivory, £1,920, Sofas and Stuff. Greek Key rug, £795; chevron alpaca throw, £295, both Jonathan Adler. Fur throw, £160, Laura Ashley. **Cushions**, from left: Arbour Caramel, £49.50 per m, Voyage Decoration; Mela Gold J730F-09, £57 per m, Jane Churchill; Moriko 131382, £49 per m, Harlequin; Baldwin L9009-03, £110 per m, Larsen. **Antique Bagues coffee table**, £3,900, Hilary Batstone. On table from left: Scallop bowl, £950, Collier Webb. **Antique candle stick**, £75, Tobias and the Angel. **Gold candle**, £38, Jonathan Adler. **Cocktail shaker** c1930's, £115, Goldsmith & Perris at Alfies Antique Market. **Gold rim antique flute**, £1,800 for 24 set, Guinevere. **Art Deco stripe sherry glass and matching shaker**, both £65 set of shaker and 5 glasses, from Nadine Okker; Japanese gold lacquer **sherry glass**, £365 for set of tray, shaker and 6 glasses, from Horner Antiques, both at Alfies Antique Market. **Card**, from £2.99, Chase Wonder. **Tealight holder**, £9.95 set of 3, Nordic house. **Decs in bowl and pear dec**, from £3.95 ea, all Norpar. **Antique 1960's pineapple**, £600, Collier Webb. **Breconbridge tree**, £150; **lights**, from £20 set, both John Lewis. **Plain baubles**, from £20 set of 12, House of Fraser. **Star baubles**, £27 set of 9, Cox and Cox. **Decorative baubles**, from £3.59; **gold fronds**, £4 ea, all John Lewis. Presents **wrapping paper** in selection from Paperchase and House of Fraser. **Ribbon**, from £2.99 reel, John Lewis. **Balloons**, £9.50 bag, Talking Tables. On mantle: **Antique bronze candles sticks**, £1,100 pair, Guinevere. **Peach glass tealight holders**, £POA, Robinson Antiques at Alfies Antique Market. **Reindeer**, £30 pair, Cox and Cox. **Tealight holder**,

£11.95 set of 3, Nordic House. **Antique French gilt and glass casket**, £1,150; **Art Deco decanter**, £650, Guinevere. **Baubles**, from £3.95 ea, all Norpar. **Brass lantern**, £40; **hurricane tealight holder**, £6, both Nordic House. **Star votive**, £20 set of 9, Cox and Cox. **Fairy light**, John Lewis as before. **Antique gilt reeded mirror**, £580, Puckhaber. **Gold leaf wreath**, £30, Norpar. **Lotus pendant light**, £199, M&S

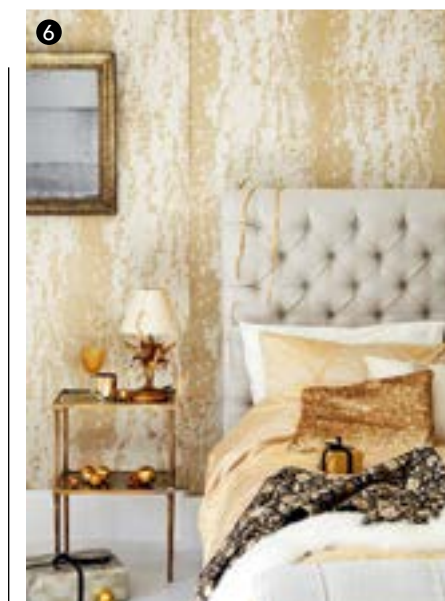
**2** **Wallpaper** papered in Lexington 311021, £81 per roll, Zoffany. **Antique gilded C1790 Louis XVI console**, £11,000, Guinevere. **Antique gilded C19th French mirror**, £1,800, Maison Artefact. From left: **Cards**, from £2.99, Chase Wonder. **Star votive**, £20 for 9, Cox and Cox. **Art Deco greyhound**, £19.50, M&S. **Bonbon jar**, £12.99, dotcomgiftshop. **Antique baubles**, £58 box of 12 themed, Tobias and the Angel. 2013 dec, £2.50, John Lewis. **Champagne**, £5.99, Sainsburys. **Antique champagne saucer** c1925, £POA, Robinson Antiques at Alfies Antique Market. **Gold 746 phone**, £64.95, Wild and Wolf. **Antique beaded clutch**, £75, Sheelin Lace at Alfies Antique Market. **Antique Wedgwood peach glass footed tealight holder**, £POA, Robinson Antiques at Alfies Antique Market. **Gold antique French Louis XV candlestick**, £900 pair, Guinevere.

**3** **Feather fronds**, £5 ea, M&S. **White and gold baubles**, £3.25; **bronze jewel picks**, £4.99; **gold berry picks**, £4.99, all Norpar. **Antique baubles**, £58 for 12 themed box, Tobias and the Angel. **Vintage silver shoes**, £50 pair, June Victor at Alfies Antique Market. Presents **wrapping paper** in animal print wrap, £5 for 3m roll, House of Fraser.



**4** **Fabric tablecloth**, Arkona in Walnut, £49 per m, Harlequin. Clockwise from top left: **Antique etched champagne saucer** c1925, £POA, Robinson Antiques at Alfies Antique Market. **Gold leaf coaster**, £7.50; **lobster shell**, £512, both Joanna Wood. **Gold stripe vodka glass** c1950, £POA, Robinson Antiques at Alfies Antique Market. **Black/gold gilt Worcester coffee cup and saucer** c1920's, £95, Beth Adams at Alfies Antique Market. **Gilt turquoise spoon** c1920, £280 box, Evonne Antiques at Grays. **Berry serving spoon** c1905, £65 pair, similar mother of pearl cutlery, both Goldsmith & Perris at Alfies Antique Market. **Cupcake**, £6 pk, Sainsbury's. **Gold leaf plate**, find similar at Kempton Antiques Market. **Glass side plate**, £9.50, Joanna Wood. **Art Deco green stripe sherry glass**, £65 set of shaker and 5 glasses, from Nadine Okker at Alfies Antique Market. **Novelty gilt duck spoon** c1964, £350 box, Evonne Antiques at Grays. **Hammersly T42 size teapot** c1930, £45, Beth Adams at Alfies Antique Market. **Scatter stars**, £3.50 pk; **star sparklers**, £5 pk, both Talking Tables.

**5** Dining walls painted in Off White, £35 for 2.5 litres matt emulsion, Farrow & Ball. **Lempicka screen**, £995, Oka. **French tilt top round oak table**, £950, Maison Artefact. **Tablecloth** made in Theon Gold, £54.50 per m, Voyage Decoration. On table: **Art Deco stripe sherry glasses** £65 set of **shaker and 5 glasses**, from Nadine Okker at Alfies Antique Market. **Art Deco amber glasses and matching amber glass decanter**, £POA; **Art Deco mistletoe design jug**, £POA, all Robinson Antiques at Alfies Antique Market. **Opaline Rum and Gin decanters**, £780 pair; **Edwardian crystal decanter with thistle measure stopper**, £650; **gilded gold rim cut crystal goblets and flutes** c 1950, £1,800 set of 24, all Guinevere. **Gold rim wine glasses**, £POA, Robinson Antiques at Alfies Antique Market. **Gold plated goblets**, £390 for 6, Hilary Batstone. **Champagne bottle**, £20; **mini prosecco bottle**, £5.75; **crostini, cream cheese and olives**, from a selection, all Sainsbury's. **Art Deco chrome tray**, £130, Nadine Okker at Alfies Antique Market. **Berry serving spoons** c1905, £65 pair, Goldsmith & Perris at Alfies Antique Market. **Biba side plates**, £8 ea, House of Fraser. **Decorative baubles**, from £3 ea, Norpar. **Large cream and silver**



**star fans**, £30 pk of 3; **glitter top honeycomb decs**, £11 for set of 5; **XL white honeycomb dec**, £15; **gold stripe straws**, £3 pk; **glitter party animal sticks**, £10 pk, all Talking Tables.

**6** **Wallpaper** in Leonida Eglomise Gold, £58 per roll, Harlequin. **Pentlow kingsize bed** in Sole Linen, £1,517, Sofa's and Stuff. **Carolyn side table** in Antique Brass, £2,100, Collier Webb. **Gilt ripple C19th antique mirror**, £950, Howe. On the bed: **Alexander jacquard gold double duvet**, £75; **gold housewife pillow cases**, £25 ea; **Shalfont satin stripe cream housewife pillowcases**, £18 ea, all Laura Ashley. **Cushions** made in from left; **Aquila in Gold**, £54.50 per m; **Moonbeam in Pearl**, £93 per m, both Voyage Decoration. **Fur throw**, £145, Cox and Cox. **Black and gold vintage jacket**, £60, June Victor at Alfies Antique Market. On table: **Gilded wheatsheaf lamp** c1970, £180, Travers Antiques at Alfies Antique Market. **Candle**, £38, Jonathan Adler. **Amber glass**, £11.50, Joanna Wood. **Straw**, £3 pk, Talking Tables. **Antique Baubles** as before. [For wrap/ribbon credits- see present shot opposite]

**7** **Fabric background** from Voyage Decoration, as before. **Gold wrap**, £1.99; **Black/Gold art deco**

**wrap**, £2.99; **gold spot tissue paper**, £2.95 pk, all Paperchase. **Silver zigzag wrap**, Berkeley Ivory 311040 **wallpaper**, £85 roll, Zoffany. **Vintage brooches** from top left: **Gold bird brooch**, £45; **Amber stone brooch**, £22.50; **Lion brooch**, £65; **Lily brooch**, £75, all Arabella Bianco at Grays Antique Market. **Ribbons** from top: **cream satin ribbon**; **black satin ribbon**, **black/white satin ribbon**, from £2.95 spool; **black lace flower braid**, £4.95 m, all John Lewis. **Gold glitter ribbon**, £5.95 spool, The Makery at Wild and Wolf. **Gold lacey ribbon**, £7.50 spool, Talking Tables. **Antique baubles** as before.