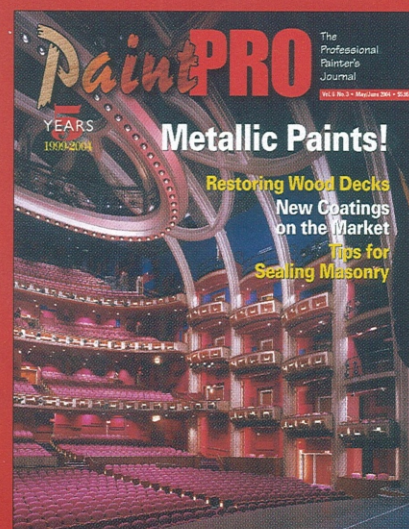


*All that glitters is not gold ...*

# A Look at Metallic Paints

*by Christina Camara*

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The days of handing clients a color wheel and giving them the choice of a flat or glossy finish are long gone. Homeowners, ever more sophisticated, are seeking painting contractors who have experience in decorative painting techniques. Savvy painters are expanding their skills, and many are mastering the use of metallic paints and powders to create a number of spectacular effects.

Metallics can make walls look like crumbling, old-world relics or shiny modern showpieces. They can change the new into the old; the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Although decorative painters are only recently turning to metallics in large numbers, creating pigments from metal flakes has been done since the Bronze Age, says Neil Cody of NCody Associates, who specializes in marketing and sales of faux and decorative products. "All we've done is perfect the grinding of it so we're able to mill it down to very small particles." And rather than mixing powders with glue made from animal hides, today's metallic powders are suspended in glazes, lacquers, oil or

acrylic varnishes, waxes and even liquefied glass.

Larry Neuberg, owner of Gold Leaf and Metallic Powders (GLMP), says metallics can be used in interiors and exteriors, and in commercial and residential applications. "They have their place almost anywhere," he says. Any surface will accept a metallic finish — metal, primed drywall, textured surfaces, Venetian plaster and more.

GLMP offers 80 colors that include basic metallics, specialty micas and pearlescent, iridescent and sparkle products that are popular with faux finishers and decorative painters. One of the challenges in working with metallics is knowing which product to use to get the desired effect. "You need a true understanding of what you're working with," Neuberg says.

### Mixing your own

Metal powders are made from actual metal particles, such as copper, zinc and aluminum. Mica powders are made from mica and natural earth pigments that are chemically colored for light fastness.

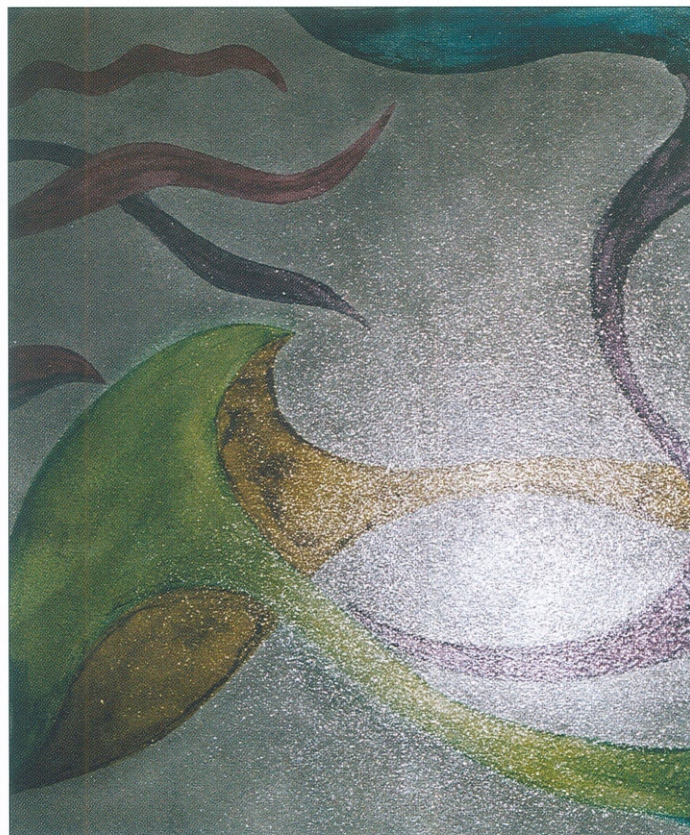
Cody says one of the most common mistakes in using metallics is mixing

metal powders with water-based clear coats, rather than oil-based products. Since metals are reactive, they will oxidize over time. Copper will turn green, bronze goes to greenish-black, and aluminum and zinc will turn black. "If it's not intended, you definitely don't want the surprise," he says. Mica powders, on the other hand, are non-reactive and can be mixed with any medium with no worries about an unwanted patina.

Cody offered a few mixing tips: Never dump the powder into the varnish or glaze or other medium — the powder can fly into the air, it will clump, and the agitation will create air bubbles. Prepare the powder first by making a slurry with whatever thinner is appropriate for the clear coat it will be mixed with.

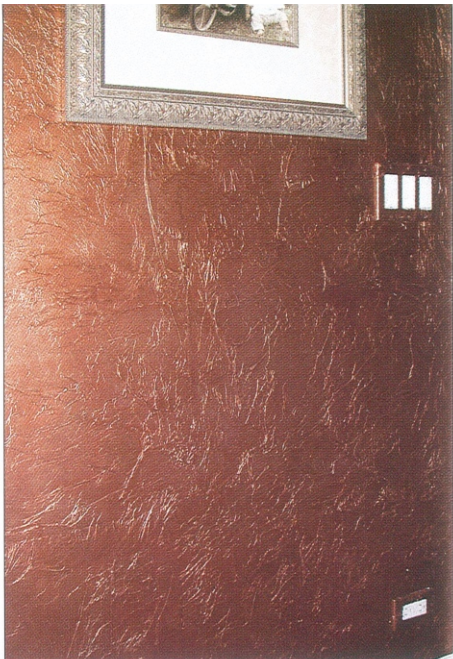
When using a water-based glaze as a medium for mica powders, first make a paste of the mica powder and denatured alcohol (not water), then mix the paste into the glaze. Use lacquer thinner with lacquer; mineral spirits with oil varnish; turpentine with waxes.

The flake size determines the type of finish — a coarse powder will produce a brilliant finish; fine powder will



Photographs courtesy of Metal Expressions





Photographs courtesy of Douglas Coggeshall



produce a dull finish, Cody says. He advises using a top-quality clear coat — the higher the quality, the more realistic the metal finish will look. Light will pass through it, and the high solids content will suspend the metal particles and create the illusion of depth. A smooth surface will allow more light reflection and give the best results, although metallics also work on textured surfaces to produce a distressed, antique look.

Creating a patina takes experience. Being something of an amateur alchemist helps too. Metal powders produce a patina when oxidized with corrosive acids, bleach or vinegar. For example, mixing a copper powder with vinegar will create a green tarnish; pale gold powder and vinegar will make a greenish-gray effect; brass with cupric nitrate and ammonium chloride will produce a bluish-green patina, Cody says. The longer the powder is exposed to the solution, the more intense the color will be.

Neuberg advises decorative painters to experiment, and to keep careful track of proportions and timing so good results can be repeated. Just as chefs tinker with recipes until perfection is achieved, the same can be said of using metallic powders. Manufacturers' technical advisers can be contacted for guidance, especially if products from different manufacturers are being used on one project.

Since the painting contractor can choose the medium he wants to use with the powders, he then can also control the unique patina and other effects created. Powders give the most possible control over the end result.

Professional artist Douglas Coggeshall of Hinsdale, Ill., who specializes in faux finishes, grisaille and trompe l'oeil, uses Crescent Bronze Powder Co.'s metallics exclusively. The company's Cres-Lite line of primers, mixing clears and ready-mixed paints comes in 111 colors and has been used in Chicago's Cadillac Theater, The

MGM Grand in Las Vegas and the Ritz Carlton Hotels.

Goldtone No. 12 is one of Coggeshall's favorites. "It's as close to gold leaf as you can get without actually putting down gold leaf products," he says. In fact, the color is so close that he uses it for small touch-ups on 24-carat gold leaf projects.

Coggeshall has used metallics to produce unusual effects. In a mural he painted of the French countryside, he created twinkling stars and candlelit windows by mixing a phosphorescent color with a latex glazing medium. He used metallics to create a warm and inviting bronze and copper living room. He produced a crinkle effect by sticking torn and crumpled tissue paper to the wall with heavy-duty wallpaper paste, then layering on the colors.

He uses metallics most often to give a room a touch of elegance — gold on a ceiling medallion or a pinstripe on a chair rail or a recessed ceiling. He advises his clients to use restraint for a





more tasteful look. "Any metallic is going to draw your attention," he says, "so I tell my clients that less is more." It's easy to take metallics too far. "It's fun because you put it down and it's breath-taking, but before you know it, it's way over the top."

### Using pre-mixed paints

Another way to create a metallic look is to use ready-made metallic paints. The mixing is already done. No special skills are needed, and simply substituting metallic paint for latex

can give a room a shimmering glow in a range of colors you won't find on a standard color wheel.

Monte Lazarus, president of Crescent Bronze Powder Co., says it's now possible to create a metallic silver, gold or copper wall using a latex that can be cleaned up with soap and water. "If you want to use our metallic paints, they're made to a formula," he says. "You open the can, stir it up and use it." Chromatone, the company's water-based metallic paint, can be used in an endless range of applications, including picture frames, statues, hand rails, light fixtures, lamps, furniture and gilding, or to create faux finish effects on walls and other surfaces. Chromatone comes in six ready-mixed colors: silver, pale gold, rich gold (brass), copper, roman gold and the newest color, oyster-pearl.

"Many people find oyster-pearl to be the perfect accent for other colors," Lazarus says, "and it can also be used as a base and tinted to produce pearl finishes in every color of the rainbow."

If you're looking for a shiny, metallic finish, spraying will produce the most uniform effect, although brushing and rolling can be done too. Lazarus says to make sure the paint doesn't overlap — don't brush or roll in two directions, up and down and then across. Always prime the area to be painted. Heavily used areas, such as banisters that will be touched often, should be protected with a topcoat.

Using a roller with metallics is not the best option because the paint tends to show roller lines, creating an orange-peel effect that's not desirable, Cody says. If a roller is used, the shorter the nap the better. Adding an extender into the metallic paint can make it a little wetter, creating a more even surface. Pushing a stipple brush onto the painted surface will eliminate any brush or roller lines and leave no hint that any tool was used.


### Special effects

Decorative painters and manufacturers all have their favorite effects. Neuberg says metallic powders can be mixed into a glaze, then applied with a sponge or rag to a painted wall to give it a glittery look. Cody says he likes a distressed effect, with just enough patina to age it and a coating of wax to make it look truly lived in. Another great look involves a Venetian plaster material that has a metallic base color, say a brown ochre or steel gray. Mixing a metallic powder into a thicker medium and washing it over the plaster will give the project a subtlety and richness of color that varies depending on how heavily it was applied, Cody says.

Understanding metallic products, experimenting with powders, paints and techniques, and then practicing over and over can give decorative painters a new creative focus. Layered textures, depth of color, shimmering light — these effects are attracting more customers and painting contractors to the world of metallics. As Neuberg puts it, "There's basically no limit."



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