# AN INTRODUCTION TO WORKING WITH ANTIQUED MIRROR AND DECORATIVE GLASS

#### **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of this CPD is to inform designers of the origins, use and application of decorative, antiqued mirrors and glass

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Uses and Benefits of Decorative Antique Mirror

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Decorative Mirror and Glass, what you need to know

Edges, beveling and cut-outs

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Verre Églomisé and Gilded Glass

### WHO IS DOMINIC SCHUSTER?

Dominic Schuster began his career as a restorer of decorative antique furniture, forming one half of the respected partnership, Compton & Schuster

In 2011, Dominic established his own company in London and now works out of a studio and workshop in Hampshire. The company specialises in Verre Églomisé, bespoke antiqued mirror glass, furniture finishes (lacquer and gilding) as well as decorative antique restoration.

Our clients are some of the world's leading architects, construction companies and designers with projects ranging from small one-off mirror designs to large scale installations in hotels, restaurants, superyachts and private residences. Dominic Schuster Ltd is proud to be 100% UK based, with every product and design created by our studio in Hampshire. We do not have overseas factories or workshops, which enables us to keep our lead-times down to a minimum whilst also keeping a very close eye on the quality of our products.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF MIRROR

A surface typically of glass coated with a metal amalgam, which reflects a clear image.

Metal coated glass mirrors are said to have been invented in the Middle East 2000 years ago, and glass mirrors backed in gold leaf were mentioned in Roman scripts

The method of making mirrors out of plate glass was invented by 16<sup>th</sup> century venetian glass makers on the island of Murano, who covered the back of glass with mercury, obtaining near perfect undistorted reflection. For over 100 years, venetian mirrors installed in richly decorated frames served as luxury decorations for palaces throughout Europe.

The secret of the mercury process eventually arrived in London and Paris during the 17<sup>th</sup> century due to industrial espionage. French workshops succeeded in large-scale industrialization of the process, eventually making mirrors affordable to the masses although mercury's toxicity remained a problem.

The modern process for silvering was invented in Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, using silver nitrate. The process involved the depositing of a thin layer of metallic silver onto glass through the chemical reduction of silver nitrate. This process was adapted for mass manufacturing and led to the greater availability of affordable mirrors.

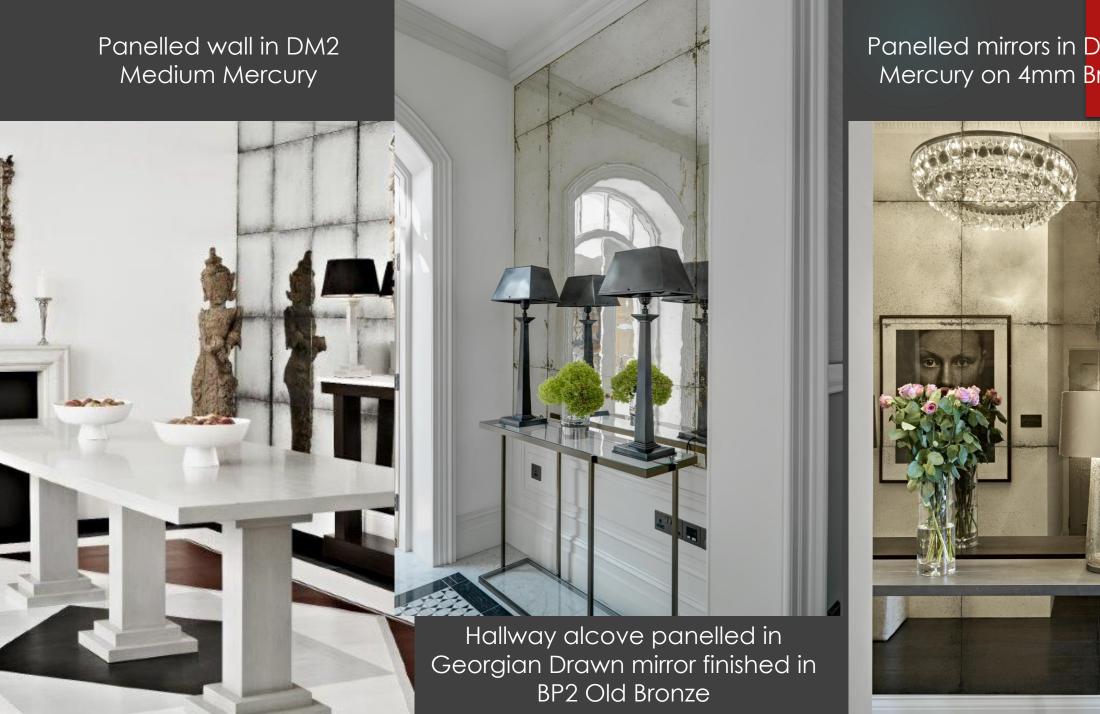
## THE USES AND BENEFITS OF DECORATIVE ANTIQUE MIRROR

Antiqued glass and mirror can be used in the same way as plain glass or mirror. The qualities of the glass or mirror are the same, as the antiquing and decorative process takes place on the reverse.

Tip: panelling a whole wall in antiqued mirror is very effective, often behind a bed frame or to make a small room appear larger whilst offering character and interest.

Antiqued mirror is especially effective as it offers a unique focal point, interest and softness.

Background image of panelled wall in plain mirror with rosettes



Panelled mirrors in DM2 Medium Mercury on 4mm Bronze Glass



Mirror and glass sheets are normally available in 4mm and 6mm thicknesses, although other thicknesses are also used on occasion.

There are many types of glass mirror, each representing a different manufacturing process and reflection type.

<u>Aluminium glass</u> is made of float glass (a sheet of glass made by floating molten glass on a bed of molten metal, giving the sheet uniform thickness and very flat surfaces).

It is manufactured with aluminium powder which is evaporated onto the exposed surface of the glass in a vacuum chamber and then coated with two or more layers of waterproof protective paint. This type of mirror can often have a very slight green tone.

A <u>low iron glass mirror</u> is manufactured by coating silver and two layers of protective paint on the back surface of glass. A low iron glass mirror is very clear and reflects accurate natural colour.

For antiqued mirror and Verre Églomisé, it is best to specify a low-iron mirror. This makes it perfect for applications where transparency and purity of colour are desired.

A <u>safety glass mirror</u> is made by adhering a special protective film to the back surface of a silver glass mirror, which prevents injuries in case the mirror is broken.

Colour-tinted glass and mirror are also very popular.
Colours can include: Copper Peach, Slate Grey, Dark
Bronze, Sky Blue, Blue Violet and Mint Green.

(left) Blue Violet in DS5 Fossil Finish

(right) Copper Peach mirror gilded with Palladium Leaf

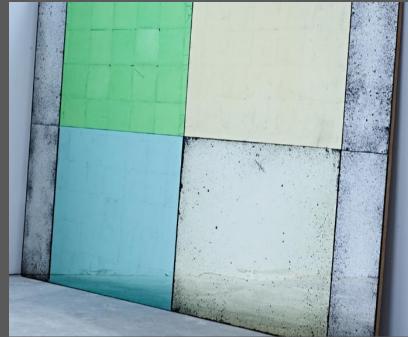
(left) Emerald Green mirror (image courtesy of JR Design)

(right)
Panelled with
a mixture of
antiqued and
gilded glass









## DECORATIVE MIRROR AND GLASS - WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Mirror and glass can be either flat or hand drawn.

Hand drawn mirror presents a rippled or beaten surface, and is generally thinner and more fragile, as well as costing more. It is available in 3mm and very occasionally 5mm.

Flat mirror uses a more modern manufacturing machine process to create a consistent flat surface as seen in most commercial mirrors.

### ANTIQUED MIRROR AND GLASS BEVELLING AND CUT-OUTS

Beware of hand finished antique mirror sheets which are cut to size – these will have a uniform appearance and lack authenticity for the discerning.

Other options to consider when ordering mirror are:
Clean-cut edges, polished edges, hand beveling,
toughening, cut-outs, drill holes and silvering.

### ANTIQUED MIRROR AND GLASS BEVELLING AND CUT-OUTS

Clean-cut edges (these are de-sharpened by hand and darkened). The clean-cut panels butt together square in a traditional manner.

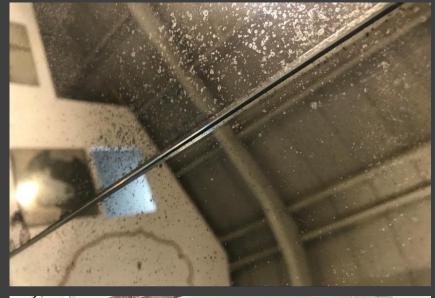
Polished edges create a small v-shape between panels and can be considered a more contemporary look.

Hand-beveling is available for unusual curved edges. A soft Queen Anne bevel is also possible.

(right) clean cut edges, desharpened and darkened

(Top left), polished edge

(Bottom left) 20mm bevel







### ANTIQUED MIRROR AND GLASS BEVELLING AND CUT-OUTS

Toughening – Only glass can be toughened. It then has to be hand silvered before antiquing. Toughening offers extra safety near a heat source or for furniture.

<u>Cut-outs</u> - these are done by water-jet, typically for socket <u>points</u>.

Drilled holes are used for handle points and can measure up to 40mm in diameter. Above this, water jet cutting is required and can be polished in certain circumstances.

Silvering can be done to any glass with or without colour (including colour tinted glass) and then turned into plain or antiqued mirror.

#### **ANTIQUED MIRROR FINISHES**

Antiquing can range from light to heavy.

Each mirror is finished individually by hand, after cutting to size and can be combined with either plain mirror or colour-tinted mirror.

Some examples of antiquing finishes are Mercury finish, Fossil finish and Old Silver finish

#### **ANTIQUED MIRROR FINISHES**

Mercury finish - Ageing is focused around the edges to recreate the appearance of degradation on genuine old silvered or mercury-backed mirror plate. This can be done with a light mercury sparkle to a heavily aged, almost non-reflective level.

<u>Fossil Finish</u> - Ageing with a higher concentration of foxing and the incorporation of larger more frequent fossilized areas.

The background image shows a Fossil Finish.

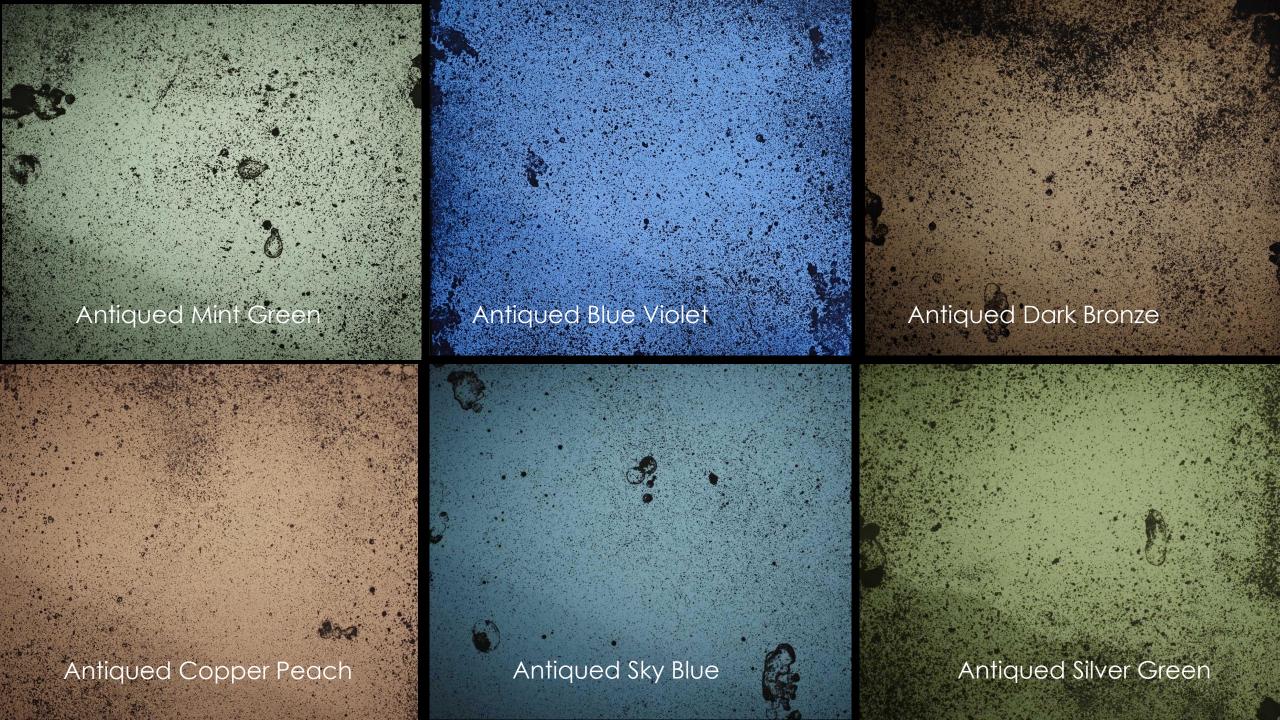
Old Silver Finish - A very popular finish, the finish has a lightness of touch and yet the antiquing is clearly visible.





Antiquing levels range from light (DM1 Light Mercury) to heavy (HM4 Heavy Mercury) and by introducing pigments, colour can be introduced into the antiquing, such as gold, bronze and copper.





#### EXAMPLES OF VERRE ÉGLOMISÉ & GILDED GLASS

<u>Verre Églomisé</u> is the process of applying a design using pigments and powders and then gilding very thin hand-beaten metal leaf on to the reverse of clear glass.

<u>Gilded glass</u> is simply applying the leaf to the glass without any design – the term Verre Églomisé is often used to encompass gilded glass.

Both processes are done entirely by hand and require specialist training

Verre Églomisé and Gilded Glass can be used on any decorative reflective surface –

as a kitchen splash back, a framed convex and for tables.

Popular leaf finishes are Palladium Gold, Silver, Moongold, White Gold, 23.5 Carat Gold and Champagne leaf.



Gold leaf splash back

Image courtesy of Jo Berryman Interiors



