Cleaning and maintaining *metal finishes*

Use the mildest method that works, test it on a hidden spot, rinse and dry, and name the product for each finish in the handover pack.

AT A GLANCE

Finish	Routine clean	What damages it	If it is marked
Bare stainless (brushed, polished, mirror)	Soap or mild detergent in warm water, soft cloth, rinse, wipe dry along the grain. Mirror: chloride-free glass cleaner.	Bleach, hydrochloric acid, mortar removers; wire wool and steel pads; scouring powder.	Light marks: non-scratching cream. Neglected: specialist re-polish or electropolish.
PVD and coloured stainless	As bare stainless, with more care: low-pressure hose with detergent, soft cloth or soft plastic brush.	Abrasive pads and compounds, metal brushes, high-pressure jets, cement splash.	No repair on site: the panel is replaced.
Lacquered brass, bronze, copper	Soft cloth, mild soap and water; dry.	Brass polish and abrasive cleaners, which remove the lacquer.	Worn lacquer: strip the whole part and re-lacquer (specialist).
Living (unlacquered) brass, bronze, copper	Dust, soft cloth, mild detergent and water, dry. Wax if wanted; oiled bronze: paste wax, buffed lightly.	Ammonia polishes; hard particles in car and stainless polishes; repeated polishing, which removes metal.	Polish only for a bright finish, mildest method first. Otherwise accept the ageing.
Powder-coated metal	Mild soap or detergent in water, soft sponge or cloth, rinse, dry; top to bottom.	Abrasive rubbing (changes texture or adds shine); strong solvents and cleaners.	Test on a hidden area. Ask the coater about touch-up.
Anodised aluminium	Water, then mild detergent. Nylon pad along the grain for heavier soil.	Trisodium phosphate; phosphoric, hydrochloric, hydrofluoric acid; fluorides; dried mortar or cement.	Marks from harsh chemicals can be permanent. Ask the finisher.

Sources: Euro Inox Vols. 15 and 16; BSSA 7.20; CCI 9/3; a US maker's care sheet; AAMA 609 and 610. A finisher's own care sheet overrules this table. Test every product on a hidden spot first.

WHICH CLEANER CAN EACH FINISH TAKE?

Cleaner or method	Stainless	PVD, coloured	Lacquered brass	Living brass	Powder coat	Anodised
Soap or mild detergent	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK
Bleach or hydrochloric acid	No	No	Ask	Ask	Care	No
Phosphoric or citric descaler	Care	Ask	Ask	Ask	Ask	No
Ammonia and ammonia polishes	Care	Ask	Ask	No	Ask	Ask
Scouring powder, wire wool	No	No	No	No	No	Care
Metal or brass polish	Care	No	No	Care	Ask	Ask
Solvents: spirit, alcohol, acetone	OK	Ask	Ask	Care	Care	Care
Wax or protective spray	OK	Ask	Ask	OK	OK	OK

OK: usually fine. Care: only as the full guide says, tested first. No: avoid. Ask: not covered by a source we read, so ask the finisher.

THE CLEANING LADDER

- 1. Dust and wipe with a soft dry cloth.
- 2. Mild soap or detergent in warm water, soft cloth, rinse, wipe dry.
- 3. Only the product named in the handover pack, tested on a hidden spot first.
- 4. Stop and ask the finisher or the partner workshop before anything else.

SPECIFICATION WORDING

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE ENTRY

The operation and maintenance manual is to list, for every visible metal finish: the finish in words and code; the routine cleaning method and named product; products and tools not to be used; the cleaning frequency [ ]; how the finish is restored and by whom; and the finisher's written care instructions [attached]. The finisher is to review the entries before handover.

INITIAL CLEAN OF STAINLESS STEEL

Remove protective film within [ ] weeks of fixing, or the film maker's stated maximum. Before handover: rinse; wash in warm water with [soap or neutral detergent]; rinse; wipe dry along the grain. No chloride products, steel wool or non-stainless pads. Remove site iron contamination. No hydrochloric acid products where they can reach stainless steel.

LIVING FINISH ACCEPTED

[Unlacquered brass] on [door pulls, bar rail] is accepted by the client as a living finish [sign-off date]. It will darken and vary with use. Routine cleaning: [soft cloth, mild detergent, water, dry]. Polishing only on instruction from [ ]. No ammonia-based or abrasive polishes.

COATED FINISHES

Powder-coated and anodised aluminium: clean with [mild detergent and water], rinse and dry, in shade. No abrasive pads, strong solvents, or strong acid or alkaline cleaners. Test any other product on a hidden area first. The finisher's care instructions [attached] govern.

TERMS USED

Living finish
A metal surface left unsealed so it keeps changing with touch, moisture and time. The client should accept this in writing.

Lacquer (on metal)
A clear film over brass, bronze or copper that slows tarnishing. It can wear where hands land and is hard to remove and renew.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- Euro Inox, Building Series Vol. 15, Cleaning Architectural Stainless Steel (2011)
- Euro Inox, Building Series Vol. 16, Colouring Stainless Steel (2011)
- BSSA SSAS 7.20, Care and Maintenance of Stainless Steel (issue 02, 2001)
- CCI Notes 9/3, Brass and Copper: Cleaning, Polishing, Waxing (2007): museum objects.
- AAMA 609 & 610-09, Cleaning and Maintenance of Finished Aluminum: US guide, revised 2009.
- A US hardware maker's finish care sheet: read 5 Nov 2026.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/cleaning-and-maintaining-metal-finishes. Make Bespoke Studio coordinates manufacture through its partner workshops. Figures are guidance only and your specification governs; some may be superseded, so contact the studio to verify.