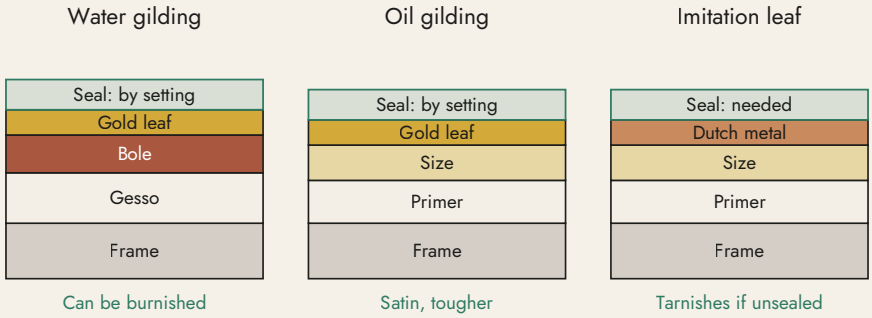
Gilding and *gold leaf* on lighting

Gilding systems for chandelier frames and arms compared: water, oil and imitation leaf, with carat arithmetic, sealing and care. Durability and care claims are the gilder's to confirm.

AT A GLANCE

System	Look	Wear and care, from the sources	Seal
Water gilding	Bright; can be burnished to a mirror shine	Fragile. Glue-bound ground is brittle and softens in very humid air.	By setting
Oil gilding	Satin, even sheen; cannot be burnished to a high polish	Tougher; the usual choice for handled or exposed surfaces.	By setting
Genuine leaf, 22 to 24 carat	Warm yellow gold	High carat resists tarnish; the weak points are the ground and the size.	For wear and cleaning
Genuine leaf, lower carat	Paler, greener (more silver)	Silver in the alloy can tarnish.	Ask the gilder
Imitation leaf (Dutch metal)	Gold colour, no gold	Copper and zinc alloy: tarnishes without a seal.	Needed
Aluminium or silver leaf	Silver colour	Silver tarnishes; aluminium may darken a little.	Needed

Qualitative only: no durability figure for gilded luminaires was found. Sources: US National Park Service, CCI (Michalski), AIC Conservation Wiki, two leaf suppliers and our gilding pages. The gilder confirms every row.



Not to scale: the leaf is far thinner than every other layer.

Layers in three gilding systems, not to scale. The ground under oil gilding varies by base material: the gilder states it. Original drawing by Make Bespoke Studio.

SPECIFICATION WORDING

GILDED FINISH: SYSTEM AND LEAF

Gilding to [frame, arms, canopy; drawing ref]: [water / oil] gilding with [genuine gold leaf, [23] carat, shade [ ]] over the ground system proposed by the gilder for the base [metal / timber] and approved in writing. Burnished areas [ ]; matt areas [ ]; distressing or antiquing [none / as approved sample ref]. No imitation or composition leaf unless named in writing.

SEALING, HEAT AND HUMIDITY

Seal: [type] in [ ] coats over all gilded surfaces, as stated by the gilder. The gilder is to state in writing the temperature the finished system is rated for at the lamp holder and cup [ ] and the relative humidity range it is rated for [ ] to [ ] per cent. Gilded parts within reach of guests: [to be sealed and noted on the care sheet].

SAMPLE AND CARE SHEET

A sample board of the proposed system on the same base material, showing leaf, ground, seal and sheen, is to be approved by [designer] before gilding starts [sample ref]. The gilder is to supply a care sheet for the handover pack: routine dusting method, what must never be used, touch-up method, and who may do it.

TERMS USED

Water gilding
Leaf laid on a bole wetted to reactivate its animal glue, over gesso. The only method that can be burnished to a mirror shine.

Oil gilding
Leaf laid on an adhesive size, oil or acrylic. Satin sheen, more robust, not burnishable to a high polish.

Gesso
A chalk and animal-glue ground built up in coats and sanded smooth under water gilding.

Bole
A fine clay, bound in glue, laid on the gesso; its colour shows through and warms the gold.

Dutch metal
Imitation leaf, usually a copper and zinc alloy. It contains no gold and tarnishes unless sealed.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- US National Park Service, Museum Handbook Part I, Appendix N: gilt, gilded bronze; 2004, modified 2020; read 6 Nov 2026.
- Michalski (CCI): Crack mechanisms in gilding: humidity and gilding; read 6 Nov 2026.
- Reilly and Mortimer, JAIC 37(2), 1998, section 7.1: spirit-lacquer imitation gilt.
- No standard applies: we found no British or international standard for gilded finishes.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/gilding-and-gold-leaf-on-lighting. 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.