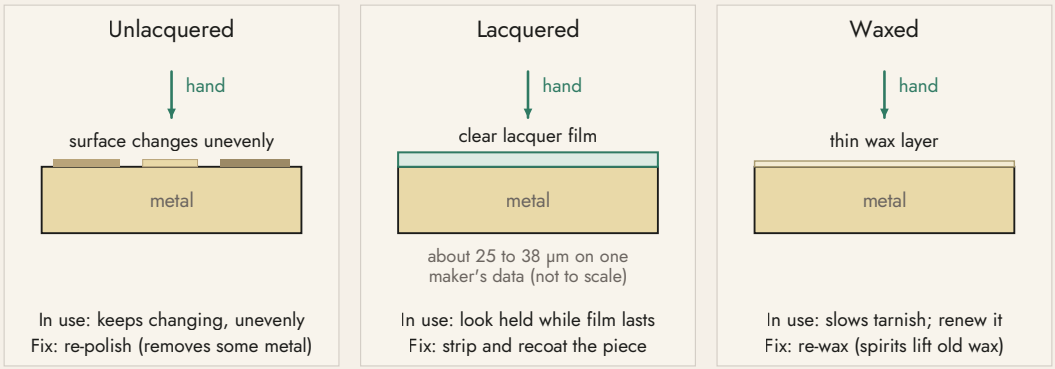
Lacquered or unlacquered *brass and copper*

Lacquer is a thin film with a life, not a permanent finish. Decide living, lacquered or waxed for each element, show an aged sample, name who recoats, and never promise a life in years.

AT A GLANCE

Finish	What happens in use	Cleaning	Putting it right	Basis
Unlacquered (a living finish)	Changes with handling, damp and time. Copper goes from reddish-orange to dull brown, then green in crevices over years; faster near the sea, and in a dry climate it may never go green.	Gentle. Metal polish is abrasive and some contain ammonia, which can attack copper.	Re-polish. This is abrasive and removes some surface metal; repeated polishing loses detail.	Conservation body; fabricator
Lacquered	Holds the polished look while the film is intact. The film always alters the look a little. It can wear or fail where handled: no test data found.	As the lacquer maker's care sheet says. Avoid abrasive polish.	Strip and recoat. If the old coat is the same lacquer, clean and recoat. Conservators call lacquer hard to remove.	Conservation body; one lacquer maker's data sheet
Waxed	A thin wax layer slows tarnish and is renewed. Conservators use it as an alternative to frequent polishing.	Dust it; protect from dust to reduce cleaning.	Re-wax. Old wax is removed with mineral spirits.	Conservation body
Pre-patinated, sealed or not	The workshop brings the colour on early, but copper alloys keep ageing whether prepatinated or not. Sealing is the same decision as above.	As lacquered or waxed.	Field-applied patina is described as extremely difficult.	Fabricator
PVD on stainless (a brass-look alternative)	A thin, hard coloured film, 0.2 to 2.0 micrometres. Damage is not repairable on site.	Mild detergent, soft cloth.	Replace or recoat the part.	See the PVD sheet

No independent durability figure exists for lacquer on handled brass, so none is given. Sources: Canadian Conservation Institute Notes 9/3 (2007, written for museum objects); one lacquer maker's data sheet for copper alloys; a metals fabricator's guidance on copper and brass. The unlacquered and lacquered rows describe general behaviour, not a promise.



Three finishes on brass or copper in section. Schematic: layers are drawn far thicker than true. Sources: Canadian Conservation Institute Notes 9/3; one lacquer maker's data sheet. Original drawing by Make Bespoke Studio.

SPECIFICATION WORDING

UNLACQUERED (LIVING FINISH)

[Element]: [brass alloy or copper grade], finish [polished / satin / burnished], supplied unlacquered and unwaxed. The client accepts in writing [ref. __, date] that the surface will change with handling, damp and time, unevenly where touched, and that no warranty is given against tarnish. Aged reference sample [ref. __] shown. Care: [cleaning method, ref. __]. The finish is restored by [re-polishing by __], which removes some metal.

LACQUERED

[Element]: clear lacquer [type and product named by the partner, suitable for copper alloys], applied to metal buffed and cleaned to the lacquer maker's data sheet [ref. __], within [the maker's time limit] of cleaning, in [__] coats to a total dry film of [__] micrometres, cured [__] days before handling. Sample approved [ref. __]. Care sheet [ref. __] in the O&M manual lists cleaning agents allowed and not allowed. Inspection every [__] months; recoat by [whom]. Warranty on the lacquer: [as stated by the lacquer maker / none]. No service life is implied.

WAXED

[Element]: [alloy], [finish], protected with [wax named by the partner]. Re-waxing every [__] months by [client / facilities team] to care sheet [ref. __]. The client accepts that wax is a thin layer that needs renewing.

FINISH DECISION RECORD

Element [__]. Finish chosen: [living / lacquered / waxed]. How often hands land: [all day / often / rarely]. Maintenance owner [__]. Approved by [name, date].

TERMS USED

Lacquer (on metal)

A clear protective film over metal, to slow tarnishing. It changes the look a little, it is a coating with a life, and it has to be stripped and recoated when it is renewed.

Living finish

A metal finish left unsealed so it changes colour with handling and time, as opposed to a lacquered one that stays as made.

Patina

A surface layer that forms on copper alloys with exposure and changes their colour, from brown towards grey-green over years. Different alloys develop it at different rates.

Dry film thickness

The thickness of a coating once it has dried or cured, measured in micrometres. One thousandth of an inch (a mil) is 25.4 micrometres.

Prepatinated

A copper alloy that the workshop has aged to a chosen colour before delivery. It still keeps ageing unless it is sealed, and even then the seal wears.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- Canadian Conservation Institute, CCI Notes 9/3: The Cleaning, Polishing and Protective Waxing of Brass and Copper (2007): written for museum objects.
- An acrylic lacquer maker's technical data sheet for copper and copper-base alloys: film thickness, preparation, timing, recoating; one product, read 5 November 2026.
- A metals fabricator's guidance on copper and brass: ageing, coastal and dry-climate behaviour, prepatinated surfaces.
- Make Bespoke Studio journal: Metal finishes, and Patination: living and lacquered finishes; the studio's practice of showing an aged sample.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/lacquered-vs-unlacquered-brass-and-copper. 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.