Metal finishes *glossary*, A to Z

Plain definitions of the metal finish words that cause trouble in schedules. The web glossary adds codes, watch-outs and sources.

AT A GLANCE

Word	What it can mean	Write instead
Brushed	Any line finish made with a brush, belt or pad.	The stainless code 2J with a grit or Ra, and the direction.
Satin	A fine abraded finish, a plated satin, or a sheen on a coating.	Say which: abraded (M31 or 2K), plated, or coating sheen.
Polished	Shiny in speech. In US stainless practice it also covers Nos. 3 and 4 with visible grit lines.	Mirror (2P), or the code and Ra.
Hairline	Very long fine lines. ASTM A480 does not define it; suppliers call it No.5 or No.6.	A sample agreed in advance.
2B and BA	2B is a smooth grey mill sheen. BA (2R) is bright and gives a clear image.	The EN code.
Burnished	Smoothed by rubbing under pressure, or a dark rubbed-back look.	Say what is done.
Antique, aged, oxidised	Trade words with no standard. Hardware keys disagree.	Colour, process, seal and a sample.
Etched	Aluminium: overall matte. Copper alloy: a pattern.	The metal and the result wanted.
Gunmetal	A casting bronze, or a dark grey colour name.	'Dark grey' plus the finish code.

The nine words that most often cause trouble.



Six finish textures, drawn to show how they differ. Schematic: not a match for any supplier's sample. Original drawing by Make Bespoke Studio.

THE GLOSSARY IN BRIEF

Abrasive blasted (sand, shot, grit). Surface struck by hard particles: matt, non-directional; the medium sets the look.

Aged, artificially aged. A trade word for chemically or heat-darkened metal made to look old.

Anodised. Aluminium only: the natural oxide thickened by an electric current.

Antique (brass, bronze). A trade word: dark chemical colour, high points rubbed back, usually sealed.

As fabricated (mill finish). The surface as it leaves the mill, press or mould, before any finishing.

BA (bright annealed), 2R. Stainless annealed in a protective atmosphere: bright, clear reflection, a mill finish not a polish.

Bead-blasted. Blasted with beads: uniform, non-directional, low reflectivity.

Blackened. Steel darkened by a chemical conversion, then sealed.

Brushed. A family of directional line finishes from a brush, belt or pad, not a grade.

Buffed. Final smoothing with soft mops and compounds: lustre, little metal removed.

Burnished. Two meanings: smoothing by pressure, or a dark rubbed-back look.

Clear coat, lacquer. A clear organic film that slows tarnish on brass and bronze.

Coined, embossed, patterned. Pattern rolled into sheet: one side (coined) or both (embossed).

Conversion coating. A chemical treatment that changes the surface film and its colour.

Electroplated (chrome, nickel, brass plate). A thin metal layer deposited with an electric current.

Electropolished. Electrochemical smoothing of stainless: removes surface peaks, easier to clean.

Etched. Aluminium: overall matte. Copper alloys: usually a pattern.

Ground. Coarse, uniform, one-direction, low reflectivity.

Gunmetal. A casting bronze, or a dark grey colour name.

Hairline. Very long, fine polish lines; not defined by ASTM A480.

Hand-rubbed. Directional satin made by hand with pads or wool, used to blend.

Living finish. Metal left unsealed so it keeps changing.

Matte dipped, bright dipped. Chemical dips used as steps inside a process.

Mill finishes 1D, 2D, 2B. Stainless sheet as supplied: 1D rough, 2D dull, 2B smooth grey sheen.

Mirror polish. Polished then buffed: the brightest mechanical finish, a clear image.

No.3, No.4, No.6, No.7 (US numbers). ASTM A480 stainless finishes: No.4 is the general-purpose polished finish.

Oil-rubbed bronze. BHMA 613: dark oxidised satin bronze, oil rubbed.

Oxidised. Natural ageing or chemical darkening: changes with time.

Passivated. Oxidising-acid treatment of stainless that helps the protective film form.

Patina, patinated. A surface layer on copper alloys: green verdigris or brown statuary.

Pickled. Acid treatment that removes a thin layer, including weld heat tint.

Polished. Smoothed by grinding and polishing, often buffed. Shiny in speech, but not always.

Powder coated. A polymer powder fused to the metal: a coating, not a metal finish.

PVD. A very thin hard coloured coating deposited in a vacuum.

Satin. A fine directional finish of limited reflectivity.

Specular. NAAMM's word for mirror-like.

Statuary (bronze). Brown oxide or sulphide conversion on copper alloys, often highlighted.

Swirl, engine-turned, vibration. Patterned grinds on stainless that hide light scratches.

SPECIFICATION WORDING

MECHANICAL FINISH ON STAINLESS

Finish: [304 / 316] stainless steel, EN 10088-2 designation [2J] to [edition], surface roughness Ra [0.5] micrometres maximum measured [across the lines], line direction [vertical], free of iron contamination. The words brushed, satin and hairline are not a specification on their own. Approved against control sample [reference, date] signed by [parties] and held by [each party]; the sample governs.

ANTIQUE, AGED OR PATINATED METAL

[Brass / bronze] with [antique / aged / patinated] finish to approved sample [reference]: process [description supplied by the workshop], colour [description], high points [rubbed back / left as patinated], [sealed with [coating] / left unsealed as a living finish, with care as in the operation and maintenance manual]. The signed sample governs.

FINISH LINE ON A SCHEDULE

Each finish is stated in this order: base metal and grade; process; code or grit and Ra; line direction; seal or coating; sample reference. A supplier's own finish name or code is attached with its written definition.

TERMS USED

Surface roughness (Ra)

The average height of the peaks and troughs of a surface, in micrometres, read with an instrument. Lower is smoother, and the reading depends on the direction it is taken in.

Grain direction

The direction of the lines on a brushed or ground surface. It is set at the drawing stage and marked on the metal so that panels are fixed the same way.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- NAAMM/NOMMA AMP 500-06, Metal Finishes Manual (2006): chapters 1 to 3 read 5 Nov 2026; US practice.
- Euro Inox, Guide to Stainless Steel Finishes (Building Series Vol. 1, 3rd ed. 2005): read 5 Nov 2026.
- BSSA, mechanical surface treatments: codes G, J, K, P. BS EN 10088-2, ASTM A480 and BHMA A156.18 are named by the sources: texts not read, confirm the current edition.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/metal-finishes-glossary. 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.