

Enamelled Boxes

The material used for enamelling is coloured glass which, in its molten state, is applied to a prepared base. This is then fired in a kiln – and the temperature used is critical and different for each colour. While a single-colour item requires only one firing, a multi-coloured item will be in and out of the kiln several times. The colour requiring the highest temperature is applied and fired first, with that needing the lowest temperature being dealt with last.

The base material is usually copper or brass – but can be of precious metal, for example a piece made by a company such as Fabergé.

Cloisonné is a technique seen mainly on boxes from China or Japan. The design is laid out with fine wire, and the shapes thus formed are then infilled. Typical designs can be floral or butterflies. The base material for **champlevée** enamelling is usually brass. The metal is scooped out to make the required design. The designs here can also be floral, or depict scenes or animals. An alternative type can use a raised pattern which has been pressed out (**repoussée**) and which is then decorated with the enamelling material.

En plein employs freehand painting on an enamelled base. The technique revived by the Halcyon Days company (who produced an enamelled box to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Penny Black) is similar to this, with the outline of the design lithographed and subsequently coloured in.

GUILLOCHE is the technique used by the Fabergé workshop. The basic design is engraved or engine-turned and this is then covered by the coloured molten glass (usually a single colour). Wonderful subtleness of colouring is achieved here by the depth of the engraving and thus the different depths of the enamel itself. Some beautiful desk boxes from the Fabergé workshop have appeared at auction in recent years.

