

Black Glass 101

Decorative Finishes

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Our third installment of Black Glass 101 will explore the different types of decorative finishes on black glass buttons. According to the *National Button Society Classification for 2009-2010 Competition*, a decorative finish is a “surface treatment or coating.” There are a great variety of decorative finishes, so we will explore them each one by one. Button collectors often abbreviate decorative finish as *DF*.

(A reminder about terms used in Black Glass 101: “Antique” means made before 1918, “Vintage” means made between 1918 and 1980, “Modern” means made since 1980, and “Transitional” means the button’s age crosses over one or more of these year divisions.)

Acid Etched/Frosted (Matte)

The terms above are used to describe a decorative finish that is achieved by applying acid to all or part of the button’s surface. The effect is to dull the natural shine of the glass. Often a stencil or resist is used so that only a portion of the surface is dulled, creating patterns and/or pictures on the surface. The designs on these buttons are very subtle. It is often necessary to tip them in the proper light to see them well. For this reason, they are difficult to photograph too.

				
This is a stenciled acid etched pattern of leaves. Size small. Antique.	Hard to capture in photo: an all-over pattern of ovals. Medium. Antique.	This is the third time I’ve shown this handy little button in “Black Glass 101.” This time, observe that the body of the button has a matte finish, achieved with an acid bath. Compare that to the shiny surface near the shank.	This scene of a deer and flying eagle shows both bright and matte finishes. It is probably based on a fable by LaFontaine. The sky is acid etched. Antique. Small.	Pictorial acid etched buttons are harder to find than patterns. This one features ducks flying at sunrise/sunset. Medium. Antique.

Lusters

Lusters are decorative finishes that have a metallic look to them. If one is entering competition, it is appropriate to include buttons with any amount of luster *except* for those having only a luster filled outline. There are several different types of luster and all of them can be used in combination with others. Also, antique and vintage lusters can look quite different from each other. (Disclaimer: By their very nature, lustered buttons catch light in creative and unpredictable ways, thus making them difficult to photograph in their true colors. Sigh.)

Silver Luster

				
An antique embossed pattern button covered in silver luster (the blue color in this photo is a reflection).	A lacy black glass with silver luster.	A charming antique picture button showing Cupid walking two butterflies on leashes. Outline design. Entirely covered with silver luster.	A impressed kitty design. The recessed background is covered in silver luster.	Beautiful heron design on a thin wafer button with a metal back. Medium. Antique.
				
This is a heavily lustered vintage button with four pastes as embellishment. Self shank. Medium	Another vintage silver lustered example. This one with an embossed oriental design.	Realistic shell button with a pink wash over silver luster,	This embossed buckle design has a green wash over silver luster in the recessed areas.	Beautiful blue wash over silver luster. Basket of flowers. Medium. Antique.

Gold Luster

			
A beautiful vintage realistic with paste jewel embellishment. It is completely covered in gold luster. Medium. Self shank.	Gold luster border on a precision inlay black glass button. Vintage. Small.	A paisley shaped antique button, heavily gold lustered. Self shank with deep thread grooves. Small.	Impressed design with gold luster in the recessed areas. Medium. Vintage.

Iridescent Luster/Aurora

Iridescent luster and aurora are really two names for a type of luster that catches various colors in the light. They may appear blue, purple, red, green, yellow, pink, etc., depending on how they are turned. Aurora is a term reserved for the vintage and modern iridescent buttons. Their colors are usually much more intense than their antique counterparts.

Iridescent Luster/Aurora (Cont'd)

				
A small antique button with a basketweave pattern. The entire surface shows iridescent luster.	An impressed design of a snail under bamboo. Only the recessed background shows iridescent luster. Antique. Small.	A vintage, molded design, imitating a salt overlay. There is a very light colored iridescent finish. Medium. Self shank.	Another vintage iridescent luster, this time with blue and purple tones. Medium.	An unusually bright iridescent luster on a small antique button. Clover leaf.

Unusual Lusters

Silver and gold are the most common metallic lusters on black glass, but others do exist: gunmetal (sort of a dull grey/pewter color), copper and bronze.

				
Copper luster on an embossed surface. The design is a frog on some leaves. Small. Antique.	A charming antique design showing a chick floating down a river on a shoe. Copper luster. Small.	Vintage copper luster with a very old fashioned looking surface design. Self shank. Medium.	Gunmetal luster on an antique black glass with a lacy surface design. Medium.	The illusive bronze luster. More brown in tone than the copper luster. Antique. Small.

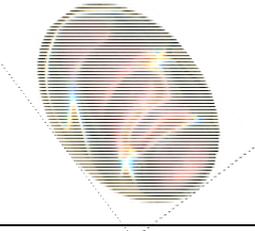
Combinations of Lusters

			
An antique button with both gold and silver luster. Small.	A vintage button with both gold and silver luster. Medium	Silver luster background with iridescent luster on the grapes and leaf. Small.	Big horn sheep, silver lustered with copper luster on his face. Antique. Small.
			
These are a very specific type of lustered button that collectors call "aristocrat." They have an "incised design on a flat surface." The outline is filled with gold or silver luster, and the "main design is brushed with gold or silver to contrast with the outline luster" (NBS Classification, 2009-2010).			

Paint

				
Thick, fired on paint. Butterfly. Antique. Small.	This bug is “encrusted” (See MSBS Bulletin, Nov. 2009) and then painted. Antique, Small	This button is an example of “chemical paint” finish which is described in the NBS Classifications as having a “dull gray color.” It is often confused with acid etched finishes. Antique. Small	Another distinctive paint finish is imitation wood. Large. Antique.	This silver paint is somewhat metallic and is sometimes confused with silver luster. It is a duller finish than luster, though. Modern

Others

				
This vintage black glass button has a decal transfer decorative finish.	This is a pearlized finish on a small, plain, vintage, black glass button. Although quite common on clear and colored glass buttons, this type of finish is not as easy to find on black glass buttons.	These modern black glass buttons have a plastic, pearlescent finish. It comes in many colors and “looks.” This type of finish is somewhat fragile, often chipping off or even coming off in one big piece. The bottom sample is also gold lustered.		
				

Combinations

Decorative finishes can come in many combinations. Buttons with more than one decorative finish are desirable to collectors, particularly those who enter competitions.

			
Birds finished in chemical paint on an easel design shown in gold luster.	White paint water plants with an acid etched background showing a crescent moon and more plants.	The entire surface of this black glass button was gold lustered before the green glass overlay was added. Very unusual modern button.	Three in one! Gold luster bat design has a pink wash highlighted with white paint! Small. Antique.

Not eligible as a decorative finish (Competitors beware!)

According to the National Button Society Classification, buttons with “luster filled outline designs” like those pictured below should not be considered as appropriate in a competition for black glass buttons with decorative finishes. They are best placed in the section for ‘Molded/cut surface designs” (6-6.5).



Bibliography:

National Button Society Classification for 2009-2010 Competition. National Button Society. 2009.

Howells, Jocelyn. *Button Materials A-Z: Identification Guide.* Portland, Oregon: Jocelyn Howells. 2006.

Consultant: Rebecca Lyon

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