**BORDERS ON BUTTONS #4: OTHER MATERIAL EMBELLISHMENT (OME)**

*Fourth* in a Series Concerning Borders on Buttons

by Claudia Chalmers and Joy Journeay

*An observant reader noticed that this article was omitted from the series on button borders. Your editor apologizes for this oversight, and thanks the reader for bringing this to our attention.*

While borders appear on modern, vintage, and antique buttons, you will discover that most examples are on antique buttons. We can assume this is probably due to the composite nature of most antique buttons, contrasted with a movement through time to decreased cost and, thus, simplicity.

Metal borders are the most prevalent border embellishment. Button materials are set in metal, and the metal settings very often are designed to serve as a border to offset and complement the prime material. Of the various metals, cut steels were commonly used to enhance antique buttons.

Other material embellishment (OME) on borders can take two forms:

1. It can be the primary border material, and/or
2. It can further compliment a primary border material.

For example, the two buttons (A) and (B) below are bordered by gilt brass (the primary border material) which is further enhanced by cut steels.

**LEFT**: An enamel button bordered by gilt brass and four cut steels.

**RIGHT**: Ivory with turquoise glass OME, bordered by a lovely gilt openwork brass border enhanced with five cut steels. Pad back.
If the cut steels appear predominantly around the border, they can become a border. In example (C), as in (A) and (B), the gilt brass border is set with cut steels, but you can see that here they are a defining characteristic of the border.

Below and on the following page are further examples of buttons with brass and cut steel borders.

ABOVE: Matte enamel cherub button.
LEFT: One piece stamped brass button depicting acorns and oak leaves bordered by 26 riveted cut steels.
BBB 587–12.

RIGHT: Brass high contour button of conventional designs bordered by sixteen riveted cut steels and an outer openwork border.

LEFT: Enamel button with multiple borders. Center enamel depiction of a basket and flowers, bordered by an irregular dark enamel border and a second basse taille green enamel border. Outside border of 33 riveted cut steels.

LEFT: Large stamped brass rooster head with facetted steels in the comb and eye. Borderd by a riveted border of 44 cut steels.
BBB 352–4.
LEFT: A heavily tinted, stamped brass button with nine cut steels riveted into the flower border. This openwork button is also embellished with a large cut steel as part of the central motif.

BELOW: One piece engraved brass button with an irregular linear shape, enhanced with 42 multiple-sized cut steels.

LEFT: Cherub and statue under glass in a prong setting bordered with 24 riveted cut steels.

RIGHT: This steel cup holds a stamped brass depiction of a man’s bust (commonly referred to as Lafayette), applied to a textured brass background. Around the man’s bust appears an interrupted border of size-graduated cut steels. This interrupted border is enhanced by the faceted blued-steel cup rim, which forms a complete border around the central focus. BBB 517–4

These two beautiful jasperware buttons are both set in steel and have steel borders. Note that the riveted cut steels in the border of the button on the left are each set in a rimmed cup that adds further enhancement.

LEFT: This beautiful pearl button, embellished with a jasperware disc set in brass, is complimented by a border of ten spindle-shaped cut steels. These features are then surrounded by a carved rope border.
**CELLULOID BORDERS.** The button on the left includes a pierced, stamped asymmetrical brass border backed by ivory sheet celluloid. The button on the right is also bordered by sheet celluloid. This celluloid is mottled blue and ivory, which is then bordered by a white metal liner, rimmed by “piecrust” brass.

**LEFT:** Delicate painting set in brass, surrounded by a bright cut pewter border, white metal liner, and “piecrust” brass rim.

**RIGHT:** Composition button with a yellow bright cut pewter inner border and a carved outer border.

**RIGHT:** Studio button signed “Lee ‘01” surrounded by a glass beadwork edge border in two colors.

**BRASS BORDERS.** (Clockwise)
- (D) Bakelite button with blue glass OME, surrounded by a pierced brass border.
- (E) Green glass set in brass with stamped brass borders accented with four glass pastes.
- (F) White glass set in brass, which forms a broad border. The white glass depicts a molded insect with a painted body and painted border on the glass.
- (G) Dyed horn button with an impression inlay border surrounding an inlaid brass bird and other designs.

**COPPER BORDERS.** Below are two buttons of black glass set in brass. In addition to the brass rim borders, both include inner borders of wallpaper patterned copper. The copper border on the right also is enhanced with a tinned decorative finish.
METAL BORDERS. (H) Multiple metal borders surround this stamped white metal button of a deer. The interior white metal forms the first inner border, then a blue original tint border is surrounded by a white metal liner under a toothed collette, inside the outer brass “ribbon” border. (I) Red original tint button of Puck, the sprite from Shakespeare’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” The OME on this button is the white metal liner. (J) Purple original tint brass button of Cupid at Rest. The stamped button is bordered by a white metal rim.

SILVER BORDERS. LEFT: Painting under glass set in silver, which forms smooth and balled borders. BELOW: Black glass mosaic button set in silver which forms a rope border.

PASTE BORDERS. (K) Prong-set enamel of a flute-playing cherub on a cloud, surrounded by a border of prong-set pastes. (L) Paste border surrounding the center depiction of a Greek woman’s head. (M) Cobalt blue enamel button with embedded gold foil surrounding a center of three flowers. (N & O) Paste borders surrounding cobalt blue enamel buttons set with borders of encrusted pierreries surrounding paillons and pierreries.

PEARL BORDERS. (P) Horn button with embedded brass basket weave center with an abalone chip border. (Q) A carved, pierced wood button with a smoky pearl carved Dragon center embellished with cut steels, within a border of inlaid pie-shaped abalone pieces. (R) Lovely portrait set within a pearl border and brass rim.
ENAMEL BORDERS:

Enamel can be a tricky topic, so the authors consulted with Barbara Barrans, and are using her input for this section. Before exploring enamel on borders, let’s discuss enamel buttons. Because enamel can be considered DF or OME, in competition it could get the competitor a point under either consideration. Three examples illustrate the distinction. Button #1 is a large openwork metal button, with three decorative assets: (a) steels (OME), (b) gilt outer asymmetrical border (DF) and (c) a central ornate enamel plaquette (the separate oval enameled metal piece) done with gold and silver foil paillons and a single pierrierie.

Barb considers this a two-piece metal button. The gilt border is a top piece forming a rim over the black back radiating spoked bottom piece. It has two DFs: gilt and a dull black finish. The button also has two OMEs: steels and the enamel plaque which qualifies in this instance as enamel material (it is a separate piece).

Button #2 is a one-piece brass picture button with enameled design (emeaux peints) as an enhancement: the black fan with colored flowers. Even though extensive, Barb does not believe the enamel has enough quantity/focus to classify the button as an enamel button. It could be measled if you put it on an enamel tray, she suspects. So, it is a brass button with enamel DF. This would not be considered OME, as this is a one-piece button of a single material. There are not two different materials making the button.

The third illustration falls more into a gray area. Button #3 is a blue, flat steel with an attached plaquette with enameling just on the bird. Here, let us think about the plaquette alone. Is it enamel or is it metal? Barb would probably use this as an enamel piece since the bird is the central focus and it is colorfully enameled, even though the surrounding fence is not. If you see it that way, then it becomes a steel base with enamel OME (in the form of the plaquette)—and two materials creates the OME possibility. Others could see it as merely DF. In that case, the button still has an OME since brass with DF is a material which is different than the steel base.

We will keep in mind that enamel is the one material in the classification that can be considered either a DF or in other instances, an OME. When you are talking about borders, I don’t think it matters much if you pin that aspect down. An enamel border is still an enamel border. A competitor should get credit for either OME or DF.

Enameling is always done on metal. Years ago, we called it “enameled metal”—now we just refer to it as enamel.

When determining whether enamel is the base material vs. whether it is used merely as a DF on the metal, you look at the focus. Is there enough enamel on the metal to make it the focus? If so, the button is enamel.

If there is more metal showing or the focus is on the metal portion, you have a metal button with enamel DF. Button #4 falls into that category. It appears to be primarily a metal button with a thin blue enameled border applied to the outer edge of the metal. This could have been done with paint as well. In either case, since it is applied onto the surface of the metal button, it is referred to as DF. This solid blue enamel is applied like emeaux peints—painted onto the metal and then fired—a very simple process. Note that enamel is only referred to as DF when it is applied to metal buttons in small amounts, as an enhancement.

When classifying enamel buttons, we consider whether the
button focus is enameled, or if the button is over 50% enameled. You don't need to apply this same test to the border separately as you do to the entire button to determine the base material. It is more important to ascertain what material the button base is and whether the border is a different material. Then you can consider whether you have a DF situation or an OME situation. Most people will just label the enameled borders simply as enamel border, with no distinction as to DF or OME.

Buttons #5 and #6 have the same border, enhancing a pearl center in #5 and a molded glass center in #6. Notice that a separate piece of metal has been colorfully enameled, making it essentially an enamel mounting. It looks like a champleve enamel technique. The base of the button is pearl and the mounting (border) is enamel, thus a different material--OME. If you had the same pearl mounted in a setting where a lot of metal showed and there was a small amount of enameling to enhance the metal mounting, then I would call that one a pearl mounted in a metal mounting with enamel DF.

This may be way to confusing to make a point over though, in regards to enameled borders, but the authors wanted to be sure that you could consider the nuance. You can look at the way the button is "constructed" or assembled when considering the labeling. A competitor would get credit for just labeling an enamel border in either case, it is hoped.

Here are two other examples worthy of reflection.

Button #7 is a net-like paste button with a separate enamel border soldered on. The button is a paste button (the central component) with an enamel border OME. This is like the pearl Button #5—two different materials combine to make a button.

Button #8 is fairly simple. It is an all-metal button, with just a bit of black enamel added to enhance the metal border with DF. The enamel does not rise to the occasion of becoming enamel OME in this case.

Button #9 is a lovely enamel button depicting a flute-blowing cherub. The turquoise enamel border sets off the central illustration beautifully.

SINCERE APPRECIATION

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