

China Decoration for Beginners

China decorating is one of the most fascinating forms of hand-work, and at the present time there is a great interest in it. This increased interest is due largely to the fact that people are beginning to recognize the beauty of good conventionally designed china, where the old naturalistic method of decoration was, perhaps, considered more or less of a fad. China should be decorated, not merely "painted." A piece of china properly decorated with an appropriate design may be a "thing of beauty." as well as an object of usefulness. Any one taking up the decorating of china may feel assured that with pretty china and dainty, suitable designs they may do work which is decidedly worthwhile.

Materials

The materials needed by the beginner are these: A covered palette, having a glass or porcelain slab; a steel palette-knife; brushes; paints; turpentine. Balsam of Copaiba, and denatured alcohol; tinting-pad: paint-rags; plate-divider.

If one does not care to purchase the covered palette at first, a heavy piece of glass with a sheet of white paper pasted to the under side may be used. A pasteboard box-cover may be placed over this when not in use, as the paints dry if left uncovered, and also collect dust. By the way, the first essential in china painting is "cleanness," both of work, hands, and materials. Dust or dirt in the materials will show spots on the china after firing, which cannot be successfully remedied. Special brushes are made for china painting. These are called square shaders No. 2 or B. The sizes used most are 3, 4, 5, and the outliners. Clean, fresh spirits of turpentine is used for painting.

The turpentine may be kept in a small jelly tumbler having a cover. Be sure to get one which is smooth on top, so brushes will not be ruined by being dragged over sharp edges. Balsam of Copaiba is used for mixing powder paints, and for tinting. Some houses recommend their special painting medium for use with their particular paints, but the Balsam of Copaiba may be used satisfactorily with any of the different makes, as a general rule. The denatured alcohol is used for cleaning purposes. The tinting-pad is made of a piece of China silk, perhaps a yard in length, folded so two thicknesses are used. This is wrapped around a little wad of wool or absorbent cotton about an inch and a half across. An elastic holds the silk in place around the wool. Paint-rags should be cut, not torn, from pieces of clean, old cotton cloth. Tearing the rags will make lint. The plate-divider is a sheet of heavy paper ruled and divided into circles and divisions of every size, and is a necessity in arranging conventional designs. The cost is about ten cents.

The Necessary Paints

The paints used in china decoration are made from minerals, and are called Verifiable, Overglaze China colors. These come in two forms — ready mixed in tubes, and in powder form in vials or in bulk. The tube paints will be the easiest for the beginner to start with. The powder colors must be mixed with Balsam of Copaiba, but the tube paints are ready for use. A list of the colors needed follows:

- Peach-blossom (pink)
- Banding blue (medium)
- Deep blue green (light blue)
- Yellow for mixing
- Violet Pompadour (red)
- Hair-brown (dark)
- Apple-green (cool)
- Moss-green (warm, yellowish)
- Dark green No. 7 (dark)
- Outlining black
- Yellow brown
- Flux (white, for glazing)

The words in brackets are descriptive, not parts of the names. These colors are all that are really necessary to begin with, but other colors may be added to the list as one needs them. An ivory or cream-color may be added, if desired; but tins may be made by mixing yellow brown, yellow for mixing, and ordinary flux in equal parts and using thin. The flux is used when a higher glaze is wanted in the tinting-color, and it is used with some red colors which do not have as high a glaze as some other ones. It is not necessary to mix it with all the colors, as they are already fluxed.

One need not be frightened by reading about troubles coming from mixing "gold" and "iron" colors. Gold colors are the pinks, purples, and violets. The only necessary thing to remember about this matter is the general rule of not mixing pink, purple, or violet with other colors. The beginner should not mix colors anyway, except as given in directions for some designs. The different tones of color are made by putting one color over another after the first has been fired in, in those cases where different tones are desired. China paints are transparent, and the beginner must remember that a color, once fired in, will show through any other color placed over it in a degree governed by the heaviness of the first color. Thus a dark color cannot be covered up, but a light color may be darkened or changed by adding the second color over it. The beginner must remember to have the first painting light.

About Firing

Usually china must be fired twice, and sometimes three times. Occasionally when gold is not used, work may be done in one firing. "Firing" is the process of baking the china in a kiln (a kind of furnace or oven made especially for this purpose), so that the paints become part of the china itself, and cannot be removed or changed by use. Kilns are expensive, and the beginner does not need one. Almost all teachers, and many stores carrying white china, do firing. The charge is small. This saves trouble for the painter, and the firing is practically sure to be done right. If the china has been correctly decorated before it goes into the kiln, it will be right when it comes out. The only exception to this is when through some chance the china is either "overfired" or "underfired." This cannot always be regulated by the firer, as different parts of the kiln fire differently.

Pink is the test-color. If overfired, pink will look bluish, and the other colors will be faint. If underfired, pink will have a brickish tinge, and the paints will not be thoroughly glazed.

The remedy for either of these cases is simple; if underfired, just have it fired again; if overfired, simply apply another thin coat of the same colors where the paint is very faint. An experienced firer usually has all the work come out right; but, of course, accidents will happen once in a while. However, as said before, if the china is right when it goes into the kiln, it will be right when it comes out.

The idea is prevalent that china paints look entirely different after firing, and that one cannot tell how they will come out. As a general rule, they do not change so very much. Of course, different colors act differently. The pinks and violets are the ones which change the most. These will look much brighter and deeper after firing. Yellow will "eat up" other colors underneath or mixed with it, and will come out brighter. After one or two pieces have been fired, the beginner will readily see how the colors act. A good way to do is to make a color chart, using a damaged plate or other piece. Put a small square of each color on this plate, having half of it used thin and the other half heavy. Number each color with black, and keep a list of the names and numbers. When this has been fired, the worker can see just how strong the colors are, and can keep this for a guide in using the paints. A good rule is to use the colors thin, unless one knows just how the color is coming out. It is easy to deepen a light color, but impossible to remove or cover up a dark one.

Matt Roman Gold is used. This comes in paste form in boxes, and directions for using it are given on each box. Turpentine is used for mixing the gold, and a small dish containing this should be kept exclusively for the gold. The turpentine-dish, used for paint, should not be used for gold, as there will be paint in it, which will spoil the gold. Separate brushes are also kept especially for gold. These brushes should never be washed out in the turpentine, as this wastes the gold. The brush, if dried, will readily soften by dipping the point into the turpentine and working it softly on the glass holding the gold.

To mix powder paints, take out a bit on the end of the dry palette-knife, place it on palette and mix with one or two drops of Balsam of Copaiba to a stiff paste; that is, to the consistency of tube paints. Turpentine only is added to the tube paints. Squeeze out a little paint from the tube and add one drop of turpentine and mix thoroughly with the palette-knife. The more thoroughly and often paints are mixed, the better they will work. If too much balsam or turpentine is used, the colors will spread, and also collect dust, which will make the china spotty after firing. If not enough balsam has been used, the colors will look powdery after drying. Too much balsam and too thick paint will look shiny when dried before firing, and may blister. Paint should look dull when dry before firing. The process of firing will glaze the paints.

To use either tube or powder paints, after mixing as above, dip brush in turpentine, lay it against the paint-rags until most of the moisture is gone. Then work the brush flatways into the side of the paint. Keep the brush flat always, do not let it round over like a water-color brush. Make it flat by pressing gently against the palette and wiggling sideways. When it is flat, remember to keep it always in that shape # do not flatten it on first one side, then on the other. This is one of the most important things to remember in china painting. Fill the brush with the paint by working it into the edge of the color, and not by dipping into the centre of the paint. Clean the color thoroughly out of the brush before using another color. Do not shake brush around in the turpentine. Dip only the brush part in, and gently wiggle it around against the side of the glass, then draw it across edge of jar to remove moisture. This will prevent the paint which settles in the bottom from getting all stirred up. The turpentine should be kept as clean as possible. When painting, dip end or corner of brush only into turpentine.

Practise making smooth strokes with the brush until you can cover small spaces smoothly with only one or two strokes of the brush. Make the strokes with the flat edge of the brush, not with the corners. In china painting, unlike oil-painting, work should be done with as few brush-strokes as possible, making each one count. Do not pat and putter over the places, cover them quickly and smoothly, and let them alone. Brush-marks should not show, and will not if the brush is used correctly. The china brushes are very delicate, and wear out rapidly if not used gently. Never try to mix paint with the brush, use the palette-knife.

Tinting

Tinting is not at all hard to do, it is merely a matter of practise and the correct mixing of paints. Mix the colors the same as for ordinary painting, and then add a couple of drops more of balsam and mix thoroughly again. Enough balsam

should be added so the paint will stay "open" or "wet" until the padding can be finished, but not long enough to collect dust. Practise will soon show the beginner what amount to use. A plain coupe plate is good to practise on. Fill the larger brush with the paint, take quick wide strokes over the entire plate, covering it with the color. It is not necessary to cover every single spot, however, as the padding will do this, but it should be fairly well covered. The pad should be ready to use, and as soon as the color is put over the plate, the pad should be gently and quickly dabbed all over the surface.

A good way is to go all over the plate quickly once, and then go back and gently work it over here and there, dabbing it softly, until it is smooth and even in tone all over the entire surface. This is easy, and is real fun when once one learns to mix the paints just right. If the tinting looks powdery after padding, not enough balsam was used, and it was not mixed thoroughly enough. If the tinting stays open or wet very long after you stop padding, it has too much balsam or turpentine. 11" the pad becomes full of color, change the und of wool, and use a clean place on the silk. Use a different place for each color. It is not necessary to use a china pencil in drawing on china. If the piece is wiped over with denatured alcohol and dried, an ordinary soft lead-pencil may be used on it. Turpentine may be used in place of alcohol, but it takes a long time to dry, and is apt to be sticky.

Treatment of Violet Design

The violet design illustrated is a simple one, which the beginner can easily handle. The flowers are painted with violet and the leaves with apple-green. The bands connecting the motifs may be dark green or gold. The edge-band may be green or gold, likewise. The tinting may be ivory or apple-green used thin, or the china may be left white.

Outlines for this design can be furnished. These outlines are in Ceramic black on films backed with paper. The film is placed in water until it begins to separate from the paper, then it is slipped on to the china, dried, and fired in. These outlines require no tracing or painting. Full directions for applying come with each outline.

Lay the china on the plate-divider, placing it on circle of the same diameter, and make pencil-marks at the lines, indicating the divisions of the circle, to divide the china into the number of spaces need ed. Then apply the outlines as per directions given with them. After the china has been thoroughly dried, paint the flowers with violet and the leaves with apple-green, filling the spaces smoothly and being sure to keep inside the outline, so the work will look neat. Do not get the paint too heavy for the first firing. The bands should be lengthened or shortened as is necessary to fit the spaces. Use outlining black mixed stiff, and an out-liner to correct or lengthen the bands. Make the lines very clean-cut and even, and of a width to match the transferred outline. Examination of the illustrations will show the arrangement of the motifs for both straight and curved surfaces.

The guide line for the gold band is made as follows: Hold the pencil firmly with the point on the china at the proper distance from the edge, and the fingers against the edge of the china. Rest the hand firmly on the table and then turn the china with the other hand. This should make an even line around the china. All horizontal lines and hands are drawn in this way. Upright bands must be drawn with the ruler. Put the gold on the bands at the edge and extend it just over the edge. Be sure the inside edge of this band is very even; do not allow it to get ragged. The gold should be put on with a smooth, even coat of medium thickness. If too thin, the gold will spread. If too thick, it is liable not to smooth out in firing, or to blister off. After the color and gold are on, look the china all over and remove all spots and finger-marks with a paint-rag just dampened with alcohol. Then dry the china and have it fired.

After it has been fired, mix the tinting color as directed above, and tint the china, padding it until absolutely smooth and even in tone. Put the color right over the design; do not attempt to keep the color off from the design. Then, working very slowly and carefully, clean out the tinting-color from the design and from the gold. A speck of paint left on the gold will make a dull place after firing. Dip the clean brush in alcohol and hold it against a paint-rag until it is almost dry. Then, with the corner of the brush, wipe the paint out from inside the black outlines. Wipe the paint from the brush quite often, and clean it in alcohol frequently, so it will remove the paint, and not merely spread it around. If there is too much moisture on the brush, it will run into the tinting and spoil it. The brush should be almost dry. Sometimes a toothpick wrapped with a bit of absorbent cotton may be used instead of the brush. In working while the tinting is wet. Be very careful not to put the fingers or brush into the tinting and make "holes" in it. Some painters prefer to wait until the tinting is dry before cleaning the design out. When this is all done, put the china away to dry thoroughly before going on with the work. Do not attempt to work while the tinting is wet. When dry put a second thin, even coat of color on the design if it needs strengthening, being sure not to go outside the outline, and taking care that the paint is not wet enough to spread. Then put on the second coat of gold, dry the china, and it is ready for the last firing. After firing, burnish or polish the gold gently with a glass brush or burnisher. If one has no burnisher, the firer may be asked to burnish it. Then take a bit of the very finest grade of sandpaper and lightly go over the painted parts of the china, carefully avoiding the gold, as the sandpaper will scratch the gold.

This design may be used on other shapes of china by arranging the motifs to fit the different shapes and making the connecting bands longer or shorter, as necessary. If the band-curves of the transfer outlines arc not right to fit the china, the lines should be drawn in by hand by running the pencil around as described for marking the gold edge-bands.

Just a word about the kind of china. White glazed china is used, and comes in a great variety of makes. Most of it is imported, and is marked with French, German, Bavarian, or Austrian marks. The Limoges china is considered the best; it

is also the most expensive. The other makes are very good, and are used extensively.

The beginner may do a great deal at home with the aid of careful directions, good designs, and much practise; but it is always best to take one or two lessons from some good teacher, in order to learn how to handle the materials correctly. This can be taught by example much easier than by written directions. After one learns to use brushes and paints correctly, work may be done alone very nicely, if one is painstaking and thoroughly in earnest.