

Golden boy

Gilder Rupert Coke grew up at Holkham Hall and has used his creative skills to restore parts of its beautiful architecture. He tells us about his interesting work.

How did you discover gilding?

I was lucky enough to be brought up at Holkham Hall in north Norfolk. I went to school in Scotland at Rannoch in the heart of the highlands on the edge of Loch Rannoch in Perthshire, and initially I went to the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester to study farming. I became interested in the specialised skill of gilding in 2006 through my girlfriend, who is an experienced gilder and conservator. I took several intense courses at West Dean College and the City and Guilds of London Art School in Kennington, and I had a considerable amount of time doing work experience at the Wallace collection in London.

How did you hone your skill?

I discovered more about the world of gilding when one of my first projects was freelancing with a gilding company in London on an architectural gilding project in a church. I found the work interesting and very rewarding and was eager to learn more and make this my career. Learning more about field of water gilding and oil gilding I found you need to be extremely patient, and have a very steady hand and a keen eye for attention to detail. Always thinking in 3D and having a head for heights – as I discovered last year working on gilding a weather vane which was at least 30ft high – you also need flair for creativity, all important to be a great gilder.

What sort of projects have you worked on?

I have done extensive architectural gilding for my brother Lord Coke at Holkham Hall on very detailed and intricate mouldings such as dado rails, skirting boards, door cases, architraves and egg and dart mouldings on the window shutters. My last major job was at The Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and I am currently working on a Georgian

house in Kensington in London. I have gilded the ceiling, as well as the cornice, frieze and panels, and I am about to start on the balustrade. There are 76 spindles that I and my team of gilders will be gilding in 23-and-a-half carat gold leaf.

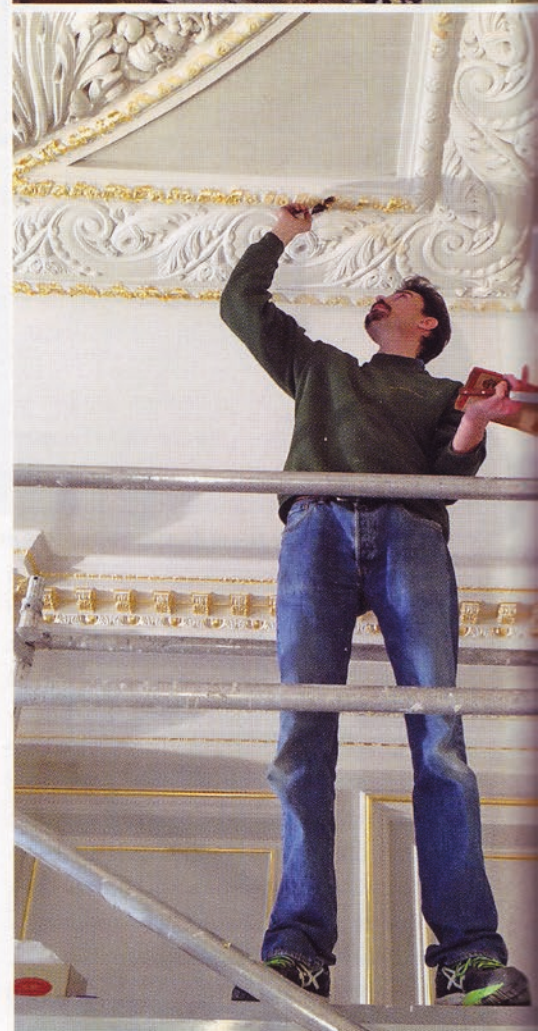
Is gilding just for buildings? Just recently I had an unusual request to gild 20 ready-made meals boxes in 23-and-a-half carat gold leaf for a special promotion for Charlie Bighams, who sells to all of the UK major supermarkets. This was quite an experiment because the gilded boxes had to be put into an oven for 40 minutes at a temperature of 220C, so I could not use the traditional methods as this would have caused an explosion! I used gelatine capsules and it worked.

Do you have many commissions in Norfolk? In March I am going to be working in Saxlingham, for an interior designer, silver leafing embellishments on fireplaces and silver leafing medieval woodcarving. Then I have two months of stencilling work and very detailed free-hand painting on 70sqm of ceiling to re-create a medieval Gothic look.

What do you love about your work? What fascinates me is that every project is very different. The work takes me to many different places, meeting new clients who share my passion, and I am only too happy to talk to them about their family heirlooms or about something they have bought recently. I love to see a tired gilded frame, furniture or a room be transformed to its former glory, and to breathe new life into it which will last another 200 years.

How can people find out more?

Contact me through my website, rupertcoke.com or call me on 07980 214520. ♦





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