



FINISHING TOUCH

From gilding to decorative painting, artisans add the icing on the cake to historical restoration projects.

FROM GILDING TO MURAL PAINTING, it's the interior finishes that make historic buildings shine. These Old-World crafts required the skills of experienced artisans who make history by remaking history.

The studios that embrace these crafts are few and far between. Here are some of the best in the business.

Conrad Schmitt Studios, Inc.
conradschmitt.com

The extensive decorative arts portfolio of Conrad Schmitt Studios, Inc. ranges from interior decoration to mural painting, stained-glass design and creation, and restoration of historic art pieces.

The Wisconsin-based company, which has done high-profile projects around the country, including for St. Louis' Union Station, the Waldorf Astoria New York, and the University of Notre Dame, has a long history.

"Conrad Schmitt Studios has 135 years of tradition coupled with 135 years of innovation in decorative arts, giving us knowledge and



experience to achieve the desired outcome on any project," says President B. Gunar Gruenke.

Started by German immigrants in 1889, the company remained in the same family until 1951, when Bernard O. Gruenke, a former employee, bought it; it's now run by Gunar and his sister, Heidi Gruenke Emery, the third generation of Gruenkes to head the studio.

"The idea behind our work is to infuse buildings with emotion and forge connections that may have been missing or have faded with time or damage," says Gruenke Emery, company vice president. "We create and conserve works of art because we understand their significance to others, and we are honored to play a part in that."

Above, as part of an extensive decorative arts project for St. Bernadette Catholic Church in Scottsdale, Arizona, Conrad Schmitt designed and fabricated 34 new stained-glass windows. Left, they also provide decorative arts services to clients around the country.
Photos by Conrad Schmitt



Treatments by the EverGreene team at the historic Egyptian Theatre in Los Angeles, left, included conserving, repairing, recreating flat and decorative plaster elements, painting flat surfaces, and reinstating decorative stencils and patterns. Photo courtesy of Netflix

Above: The EverGreene team removed the overpaint at the Grand Army of the Republic Hall in the Chicago Cultural Center, conserved the original finishes, replicated areas of non-historic finishes, conserved the gilded finishes on ornamental surfaces, and inpainted sections of the Tennessee Pink marble walls. Photo by Tom Rossiter

EverGreene Architectural Arts, evergreene.com

Founded in 1978, EverGreene Architectural Arts, team of more than 100 restoration experts, is the largest and best-known specialty construction contracting firm in the United States that's dedicated to creating, conserving, and restoring the most significant art, architecture, and artifacts.

The company, which is based in Brooklyn and has offices in Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles, specializes in conservation, plasterwork, and decorative painting and finishes. It also offers new-design services.

"Our traditional handcraft skills are leveraged by 21st-century technology, which allows us to take on large-scale complex projects," says Creative Director Alan Carroll, who began his career 35 years ago as a decorative painter and mural artist. "We can provide the attention to detail of a boutique firm with the ability to work across the country."

He notes that EverGreene also provides comprehensive pre-construction services ranging from surveys and condition assessments and conceptual planning and design to the implementation of large-scale restorations.

Carroll considers himself a "temporary caretaker, in a long line of stewards who have looked after our grandest cultural statements—our libraries, religious spaces, theaters, universities, state capitols, and monuments. My work is a service to the next generation."

R. Alden Marshall & Associates, LLC, raldenmarshall.com

For over four decades, R. Alden Marshall & Associates has been known for its historic restoration and conservation of Cultural Heritage Properties, with a focus on projects that are listed on the National Register.

The family-owned company, whose latest awarded projects include the next phase of the restoration of the cast aluminum and art cast bronze of the Louisiana State Capitol in Baton Rouge, has won numerous awards, including several National Trust for Historic Preservation Awards for Restoration.

"Our years of experience in restoration are backed by our training and experiences in mechanical engineering, material physics/sciences, architectural and art conservation, and taking extensive time in becoming knowledgeable of historic trades and historic building practices in



The interior of St. Mary's High Hill, one of the famous "Painted Churches of Texas," was restored by R. Alden Marshall & Associates. Photo by R. Alden Marshall & Associates



Left, R. Alden Marshall & Associates removed the corrosion and re-patinaed the 1896 bronze monument of Gov. John Frederick Hartranft outside the Pennsylvania Capitol. Photo by R. Alden Marshall & Associates

Europe and America,” says Robert Alden Marshall, PhD, APT RP, the company’s director and senior conservator. “Knowledge of materials and physical laws applied with the skills of great artisans and cutting-edge science are what we bring to our work, which has included many state capitols, universities, churches, and cathedrals.”

The Gilders’ Studio, gilders.com

Specialists in architectural gilding, the conservation of sculpture, and decorative finishes, The Gilders’ Studio, established in 1985, is known for large-scale interior and exterior installations of gilding.

The studio, which was commissioned to conserve and restore the gilded panels inside the Washington Monument, has installed over 200,000 square feet of gold leaf to exterior and interior surfaces across the globe, including at Union Station in Washington, D.C. and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

Its aluminum leaf graces the main lobby ceiling and organ pipes at the Orange County Performing Arts Center in Costa Mesa, California, and on the Hall of Honor at the NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte, North Carolina.

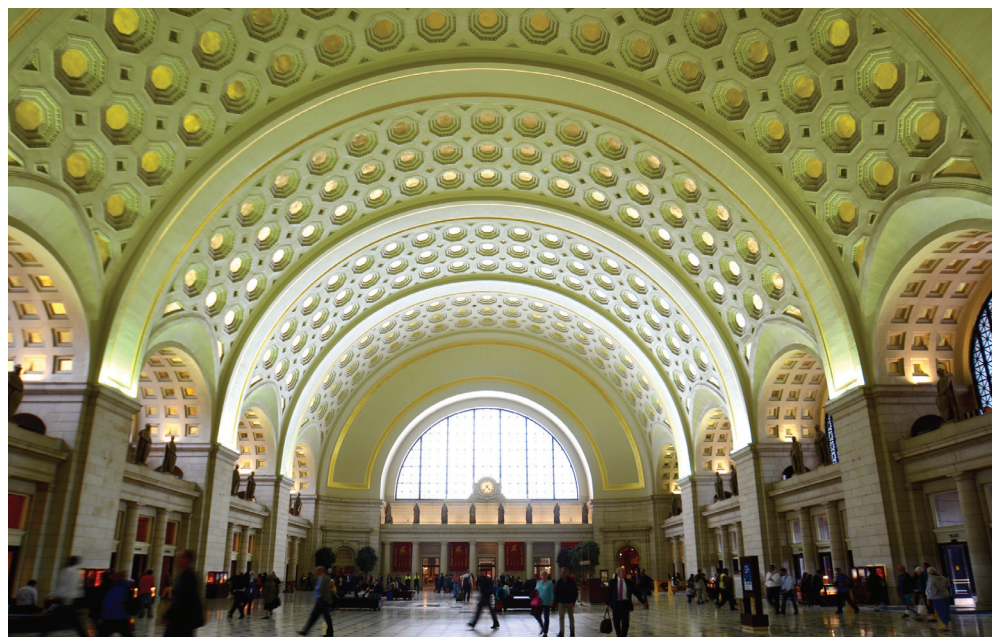
Below and right, The Gilders’ Studio prepared and installed over 8,000 square feet of 23-karat gold leaf to the ceiling coffers and arched bands on the end walls at Union Station in Washington, D.C. and stenciled them to match the original colors and pattern. Photos by The Gilders’ Studio

Founder and owner Michael Kramer, who is listed in Who’s Who in American Art, takes the hands-on lead in every project from beginning to end, supervising a team of six artisans. A past president of the Society of Gilders, Kramer, who worked for several master artisans before establishing his own firm, has more than half a century of experience in the field.

He has taught gilding and decorative painting at several organizations, including the Smithsonian and the Society of Gilders. His chapter “Exterior Architectural Gilding” was published in the Archtype Press book “Gilded Metals.”



Above, at The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, The Gilders’ Studio applied a linear textured pattern to the main rays, which were gilded with 23-karat gold leaf as were the stars and rings above it. The team also restored the circa 1869 gilding on the balustrades with 23-karat and 12-karat gold leaf.





Left, at First Church of Christ in Woodbridge, Connecticut, John Canning Co. created the ornamental painting that gives the illusion that the ceiling and walls are higher than they actually are. The technique also makes the apse look deeper. Photo by Robert Benson Photography

Above, John Canning Co. restored the historic masonry, decorative finishes and gilding at Mellon Auditorium in Washington, D. C. and cleaned and repaired the stone. Photo by Felix Ian Paden Photographer

John Canning Co. Ltd, johncanningco.com

An architectural arts restoration contractor with nearly a half century of experience, John Canning Co. provides interior design, preservation consultation, and specialty trade contracting services for all stages of historic restoration and conservation projects undertaken by design professionals, historians, and preservationists.

The old-world decorative finishes contractor designs and paints new decoration and artwork in the established style or period to blend into the existing spaces.

“We are expert preservation problem solvers with a goal of perfecting preservation,” says President David Riccio. “We find the architectural arts restoration, preservation, and conservation solutions for the most complex problems and situations and can complete projects on tight timelines.”

During its long, storied history, John Canning, which was established in 1976 by the master craftsman of the same name, has completed projects in countless locations in the United States and has restored some of the nation’s most historic buildings as well as landmark churches, theaters, museums, and libraries.

Great designers and artists like John Ruskin, Richard Morris Hunt, Owen Jones, Elmer Garnsey, Louis Comfort Tiffany, and Herter Brothers remain the company’s guiding light.

“We prescribe to Owen Jones’ Proposition Number One—The Decorative Arts Arise from, and should properly be attended upon, Architecture,” Riccio says. “Decorative painting can transform a space not just with the beauty it adds to, but the decoration and art can also provide inspiration and education to all those who pass through the buildings while displaying its history.”

John Tiedemann Inc., johntiedemann.com

Since its founding 70 years ago, John Tiedemann has worked on the restoration and conservation of more than 4,000 historic buildings.

Although the family-owned company, which has been operating for over four generations, focuses on religious spaces, its teams also work on historic hotels, museums, libraries, theaters, schools, and government buildings.



At Boston’s historic Emerson Colonial Theatre, John Tiedemann revitalized the interior with conservation cleaning, plaster repairs, decorative painting, and gilding. Photo by Carl Puentes Photography Boutique

IN-DEPTH PRODUCTS INTERIOR FINISHES



Above, John Tiedemann conserved ornamental plaster, historic finishes, and murals in the grand ballroom, main lobby, and Persian Terrace of New York's Marriott Downtown Syracuse. Photos by Carl Puentes Photography Boutique

Right, Swiatek Studios exposed and reproduced original Celtic art work throughout South Buffalo's Holy Family Church. Photo by Swiatek Studios

Its services include plaster conservation and restoration, painting, fine-decorative finishes, woodwork, and interior renovations.

"What sets us apart is our craftsmanship, honed over generations, and our unique proprietary equipment, custom developed to access hard-to-reach areas in delicate historical spaces," says President Raymond Tiedemann, whose grandfather, John Tiedemann, established the business in New Jersey in 1954. "We also use proprietary products specifically designed for the stabilization of plaster, ensuring that the original integrity of the structure is preserved while extending its lifespan."

Tiedemann notes that "every project serves as a bridge between past and present, allowing us to safeguard historic structures and their intricate details—from delicate plasterwork to vibrant murals—for future generations."

Swiatek Studios, swiatekstudios.com

The family-owned and -operated Swiatek Studios, based in Clarence, New York, specializes in architectural restoration and the artistic application of paint, plaster, and stained-glass windows.

"We were founded with the fundamental purpose of preserving the historic architectural identity of churches, homes, and public buildings,



both small and large," says Brett D. Swiatek, who, along with his sister, Stacey Swiatek, took over the company in 2007. "Our active engagement with our clients often allows us to thrive in markets that might be burdened by a budget and strict restoration guidelines."

Swiatek Studios, which was founded as H. Swiatek and Son Painting in 1959, initially worked with hundreds of churches in Upstate New York. "Expertise in plaster, paint, stained glass, and the intimate knowledge of the liturgy allowed us to thrive and grow within the non-secular community," Swiatek says, noting that since the third generation of the family has been at the helm, the company has tripled its labor force without compromising on the principles that it was founded upon.

Swiatek, who was exposed to the works of iconic architects like Louis Sullivan, H.H. Richardson, and Frank Lloyd Wright and the importance of preservation in his community at a young age, says he is proud to have the opportunity to pass on the knowledge to another generation. **TB**



Left, Lauren Sepp and her father, Peter Sepp, represent the second and third generations of the company. Photo by Sepp Leaf Products. Right, Bill Gauthier of Roussel Studios gilded Evelyn Beatrice Longman's Spirit of Communication statue in the AT&T Discovery District in Dallas using leaf from Sepp Leaf Products. Photo by Bill Gauthier for Roussel Studios




Sepp Leaf Products, seppleaf.com

For more than 50 years, architects, designers, specifiers and contractors have used Sepp Leaf Products as the source for the widest selection of genuine gold, silver, palladium, platinum, metal and supplies.

The third-generation family-owned company, based in New York City, offers an extensive selection of leaf that includes karats and shades for interior and exterior application from around the world, and its products adorn historic landmarks, cultural icons and civic institutions across the globe.

"Gold leaf has a rich history in craftsmanship, adding a luxurious touch to various architectural, restoration and art conservation projects," says Vice President Lauren Sepp. "Our leaf can be found everywhere, and we are privileged to work with some of the most well-known architects and designers in the field."



Cathedral of the
Immaculate Conception,
Kansas City, MO
by The Gilders' Studio, Inc.

Vase created by
Scott Potter
Photo by
Robert Diamante

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