



## Etched Brass Signs —1. The Product.

Traditional brass nameplates have been around for a very long time, and to present a certain image they remain popular today. Before advising a customer to choose brass however, it is important to fully understand the product. It is also important that we should understand where the signs are going, if they will be indoors or outside, so that we can manufacture to the best possible specification.



The most common use for brass signs is for traditional nameplates outside the offices of businesses such as solicitors, doctors, and similar professionals. It also makes superb wayfinding signage for hotels and apartments. Brass is often requested for outdoor applications where it would be totally impractical, so it is important that you discuss the options with your customer.



Satin brass with polished border and polished brass fixings.

Indoor signage can be lacquered, so that it does not tarnish, and cleaning is simple and minimal, but it is important to get the design right at an early stage. Polished brass can be too reflective for indoor wayfinding signage, satin brass often works much better. We have therefore perfected a technique that applies a gentle satin finish to the signs while retaining a polished border, very useful for matching polished brass fittings.



Chemical Etching and Digital Anoprinting for the Sign Trade.

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## Etched Brass Signs—2. Maintenance.

The most important thing to understand about brass is that it tarnishes. The copper content that gives brass its colour is very reactive, and will oxidise, darkening the surface. For indoor signage this is not a problem, the signs can be lacquered, sealing the surface and preventing oxidation. It is not possible to lacquer brass for use outdoors however, no matter what some people may claim. We have tested every type of lacquer, and none give a satisfactory life outdoors. There is nothing special about lacquer, it is just colourless paint, and because it has to be clear, this limits the products that can be used to make it, so lacquers are not even very good paints. They work indoors, but outdoors they fail, often in less than a year. When the lacquer does fail, it produces small brown spots. These will eventually spread until large patches of the surface have become almost black, while other areas remain as polished brass.



If your customer wants nice polished brass signs outdoors, then they will have to get used to using metal polish. Some people love doing it, others won't ever want to polish brass signs, so it is important to communicate this fully before selling your customer a brass sign. Some people choose to have lacquered brass, and just accept that it will require replacement every year or so. Our gold anoprinted aluminium may be a good alternative.





## Etched Brass Signs —3. The Process

To fully understand the process you should read our separate guide on chemical etching. Etching into brass is basically similar to traditional engraving, it cuts an image into the surface of the metal, and that image is then usually filled with paint.

We etch into brass using a photographic process that reproduces very fine detail. Text, drawings, and even photographs can be reproduced in perfect clarity. There are times however when it is more important to achieve greater depth rather than fine detail. There is a myth that old-fashioned engraving gives better depth than etching, but in reality, any image that is crude enough to engrave, can be etched to greater depth too. If a brass sign is going to be cleaned with metal polish, we can etch deeper so that we can apply a thicker coat of paint to withstand polishing. It is important that you communicate this when ordering the sign, so that we know which processes to use.

Because we etch away the brass rather than removing it with a mechanical cutter, we can etch away the metal to leave the text raised without unsightly cutting marks in the background. This is a useful technique for making wayfinding signage that matches cast bronze effects. We can etch deeper and apply a textured finish to the background.



Cast bronze effect wayfinding signage.

If the design is suitable we can etch to much greater depths without loss of detail, to produce brass rubbing plates or tactile signage. This process also makes good floor marker plates to set into footpaths, because a bit of wear scuffs the raised detail, producing good contrast. We can use all of these techniques in the same way into bronze and copper which we always have in stock.



3mm brass etched to a depth of 1mm.