

Felt Tips

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The Painted Glass Blues

(Apologies to Spike Jones)¹

Does painting your glass void your warranty rights?
If the manufacturer says "don't do it", do you paint it—in spite?
If you paint it anyway, do you have sleepless nights?
Does painting your glass void your warranty rights?

You have probably seen it without recognizing it. It is done to hide the unoccupied spaces behind the storefronts of many buildings. In fact, it can become "art". (If you have the time, visit the renovated Warner Theater in Washington, and walk along the E Street and 12th Street sides of the building. The storefront glass has been painted with murals of the famous performers who have appeared at The Warner Theater during the past sixty years.) "It" is field painted glass. Field painted glass is not a recommended practice. "Says who?" you say. The Flat Glass Marketing Association, that's who.

Recessed in the not so deep and dark corners of FGMA's 1990 Glazing Manual you will find a series of statements advising glass users to apply nothing to the glass surface. On page 43 of the Manual are a series of Post-Glazing Guidelines, which include the following:

1. Identify glazed areas by hanging narrow streamers from the framing. Do not mark directly on, or fasten identification to, the glass.
2. Advise general contractor to clean installed glass frequently during construction. Construction dust, leachate from concrete and rusting steel can combine with dew or condensation to form mild chemicals which may etch or stain glass.
3. Advise general contractor not to store or place other materials in contact with the glass.

The intent seems obvious: Don't touch it with anything, or else something bad happens to the glass surface. [You can look at it and point at it, but don't touch it!] What's so bad? The smooth glass surface loses its smoothness; it becomes etched (which is not desirable). Etching the glass surface reduces the strength of the glass.²

Etching the surface of tempered glass is especially dangerous. Tempered glass is specially manufactured glass which has internal stresses within the glass material making the glass four times stronger than normal float glass. This strength is desirable since the stronger glass can withstand wind loads and impact loads better than float glass of the same thickness [desirable]. To provide the strength characteristics, the surface of a tempered glass pane is stressed differently than the interior of the pane; etch the surface, and the

stress forces release themselves, causing the pane to shatter [not desirable].

Okay, so why shouldn't you paint the glass?

If it is permanent (not ever to be removed) it is acceptable. There is a new spandrel glass available, which instead of having a traditional ceramic frit to provide the vision barrier, there is a fluorocarbon paint coating providing the vision barrier.³

If the paint coating is not meant to be permanent, then you have to remove it. That is where the problems arise. You have to find a way to remove the paint without etching the glass surface. Don't use a knife blade to scrape it off, and don't use any chemicals which may adversely react with the glass material [a vague defensive statement]. Glass is supposed to be cleaned with a soft, clean, grit-free cloth, mild soap, detergent, or a slightly acidic cleaning solution, then rinsed immediately with water, and promptly wiped of the excess water by a squeegee. Grease and glazing compounds can be removed with commercial solvents such as mineral spirits or naphtha. Acrylic and polycarbonate glass materials have similar cleaning requirements.⁴

So what does all this have to do with a warranty? Simple, glass manufacturers subscribe to (and helped write) FGMA's guidelines. Want to be able to use your glass warranty? Don't paint the glass! If you do paint the glass, the warranty is voided — by you.

Sources:

1. You may remember this Spike Jones ditty from the fifties. [If you know the second stanza, I'd like to know the words]:
*Does your chewing gum lose its flavor on the bed post overnight?
If your mother says "don't chew it", do you swallow it—in spite?
If you leave it on your tonsils, do you heave it left and right?
Does your chewing gum lose its flavor on the bed post overnight?*
2. Flat Glass Marketing Association, Glazing Manual, 1990 Edition. Page 19.
3. Linetec Company in Wausau, Wisconsin, offers PPG's Duranar coatings on glass.
4. Laminated Safety Glass Association, Standards Manual, Page VI-2. GE Plastics, Lexan Sheet Architectural Guidebook, MR5 Product Warranty, SPW-2202C (2/92) GE. Cyro Industries, Arylite and Cyrolon ZX Product Literature (1989).

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