

Cleaning Copper Cups

So, you've arrived back home from the auction in Manchester or Blackpool with a box of goodies and sitting in the bottom is an old, tarnished set of copper cups. If you're anything like me then you'll probably want to keep that patina on them rather than clean them up and polish them, however if you really do want to clean them up and strip back the patina to start again, what's the best way?

This is probably the single most asked question I receive via my website and so, this time I will be dealing with one of the best methods I have found of doing this and it's cheap, simple and easy too! Please note that I am referring to copper cups here and if you have a chop cup you will want to be very careful that you don't get any liquids inside and seams where a gaff is spun in, you've been warned!



The idea of using salt and vinegar to strip back a patina was passed onto me by Bill Palmer of the cups and balls museum and it (literally) works like magic! Here's what you'll need;

Regular household salt, vinegar, washing up liquid, a small container, paper towels, metal polish and dusters.

For demonstration purposes I have cleaned up my Riser Mini's because as well as a bit of patina, they had residual polish on the mouth bead that had caused some mild corrosion. Here's the 5 steps to a brand new, polished finish again!



Step1. Take your container and pour in a cup of vinegar and dissolve 2 tablespoons of salt, stirring well until it no longer feels "gritty." The exact measurements are not really critical though I have found from experience that this is a good ratio. The important thing is to make sure that the salt dissolves well into the vinegar.

Step 2. Using a paper towel soaked in the solution, clean the cup and watch the patina simply melt away! You'll want to make sure that you get into any nooks and crannies around mouth beads etc. If you also wish to clean the inside of the cups you can simply swill the solution around inside and give them a light wipe. You should find that there's no need to put any pressure on to clean the old patina away.



Step 3. Wash off the solution with warm water and a little washing up liquid and then fresh water to remove and suds before drying with a paper towel. This helps to neutralise the solution. As I mentioned earlier, it's a good way to start “afresh” if you want to develop a deep, rich and even patina without any uneven blocks or areas caused by fingerprints etc.



Step 4. Apply metal polish to the cups and leave to dry* before buffing to a nice finish with a clean cloth.



*Make sure that you follow the guidelines on the bottle, not all polishes require you to let them dry.



The salt and vinegar solution really does work like magic at stripping away the patina to a nice shiny finish. It's a great solution to use if you have an uneven patina (mostly caused by finger prints in odd areas that have caused the copper to patina at a different rate to the rest of the cup) and wish to start again and develop an even patina for yourself, and remember... The best way to develop a patina on your cups is to **PRACTICE WITH THEM!**