

Finishes & Textures

by Mike Prero

It may have started off as just a piece of cardboard and some matches, but the match industry has been quite creative when it comes to the matchbook—different sizes, different shapes, different finishes and textures. And, perhaps not surprisingly, when one manufacturer came out with something new, others soon introduced their own versions.

There is some overlap between finishes and textures, of course, but here's the way I see it...

Finishes:

The normal finish for a matchcover is a smooth, fairly polished, surface which can come in any color or combination of colors. Ah, but then the innovations begin!

Glazing was a early process of making the cover shinier by applying a liquid application to the surface of the cover. This was commonly used on pre-war Federals, for example.

Mirro-Gloss applications had the same intent, but, here, a thin layer of plastic overlaid the cover, almost like cellophane. thus laminating the cover more or less. This was a Universal trademark introduced in 1941. It looked great when it was new, but, as the cover grew older and more handled, the plastic tended to develop air bubbles and/or peel at the edges.

Metallic, as the term implies, denotes a metallic sheen, usually highly polished and very slick. The two most commonly seen colors here are gold and silver, but other colors certainly exist. Universal introduced theirs c. 1934, but metallics proved very popular, and most manufacturers over the years produced their own versions, including Monarch and Superior

Woody covers have the appearance of a wood grain background (so does that make Woodies a 'finish' or do they just have the 'appearance of a different finish?'). Most are shades of brown, but other colors exist. Most

manufacturers had their own versions.

Uniglo, another Universal introduction, gave covers a deep, oily feel, almost 3-D-like. These were produced from 1972-1987. Towards the end, Universal introduced the Uniglo-II, sort of a “Uniglo-Lite” version, but Universal went out of business shortly thereafter, so there weren’t many Uniglo-II’s produced. Diamond came out with its own Uniglo-type cover, but it was never anywhere near as popular as the Universal version.

Satin covers were quite a radical departure from the norm. Here, the surface of the cover was made up of a solid plain of individual satin or satin-like threads, giving the cover a cloth-like appearance. Universal and Diamond were the big producers here. Satin covers can be very attractive, but they can ‘unravel’.

Rainbow, again from Universal, featured an oily, multi-colored, pearl-like finish (not to be confused with Pearltone); As with pearls, the colors seems to flow into each other. They were produced from 1979-1987.

Leatherette was a more recent offering. These covers featured a leather-like appearance. They never became popular and, hence, few were produced. Most are brown, or shades thereof, but other color exist.

Jute was even more recent. Here, the cover has a recycled paper, shopping bag-type appearance. These covers often appear with a foil text or foil design. Atlas was the innovator for this one. Most are brown.

Textures:

Raised-Ink covers have text or designs raised above the surface by heavy/thick ink (not to be confused with Embossed). Like Metallics, Raised-Ink covers became something of a staple for the industry, and many manufacturers produced their own.

Filigree was Universal trademark for its covers with a raised, plastic-type, bubbled surface; comes in a variety of patterns, but they’re all basically a random spread across the surface of the cover. They were produced from 1969-1987. Although a very popular innovation, this one was *not* widely copied by competing manufacturers. Perhaps it was too expensive for smaller companies to deal with.

Florentine covers featured customized raised-ink designs. I’ve also seen the designs made of Filigree rather than raised-ink. The difference between Florentine and Raised-Ink or Filigree covers is that in Florentine covers it’s the background (in specific designs) that is done in Raised-Ink or Filigree rather than the text or pictures. From what I’ve seen, this is an exclusively Universal idea.

Embossed covers have a portion or portions of the surface raised through pressure from the back of the cover (‘bumps’, as it were). Very popular technique. Most manufacturers produced their own.

Cameo was a Universal trademark for its debossed-looking covers (actually, a printer once told me that there’s no such thing as ‘debossing’). In any event, here, the debossed portion is actually lower, rather than higher, than the surrounding surface of the cover. Cameos sometimes exhibit embossing, debossing, and other different finishes and textures all at the same time. They were produced from 1965-1987.

Signet was a special type of debossed cover. Here, the debossing is ‘V-shaped’, giving the foil text a deep, chiseled look. They were produced from 1963-1987 by Universal.

Pearlton was Superior’s trademark for its covers with fine horizontal ridges running the width of the cover, giving them a subtle, lined appearance. Universal, Diamond, Atlas, etc. all had their own versions.

Plus, there are a variety of other features that affect the finish and/or texture of a cover—knotholes, odd strikers, lenticulars, stickybacks, easel-backs, etc.

