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UPDATE: THURSDAY, JAN 10, 2008

Shuffle Your iPod's Look

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By: Zack Stern

What's shinier than an iPod? A copper or gold-plated iPod.

What you need:
Gold, copper, or other plating solutions*
Wall transformer with power leads*
Metal wands for plating*
Cloth strips
Soft Scrub
Vinyl gloves
Eye protection
Philips 0 screwdriver
Hobby knife
Guitar pick

*Available as a brush-on plating kit from Caswell Plating or other sources.

iPods look good, but they all look alike. Make your working iPod stand out with a new metal backing. Just permanently cover the original stainless steel by electroplating a new layer on top. Choose from gold, copper, nickel, tin, chrome, bronze, or other finishes.

We tried gold- and copper-plating kits from Caswell Plating, for flashy and retro results. Be warned that gold can be difficult to apply, while copper is comparatively easy. We'll explain the process for either metal.

Chrome is boring

Step 1: Split the iPod case
We're working with a fourth-generation iPod. (Any stainless steel iPod should be similar, but the electroplating process won't easily work on an aluminum Mini.) Carefully insert a hobby knife blade into the seam between the metal backing and plastic front. Aim for a point next to the fast-forward or rewind buttons. Point the knife down, flush against the metal backing, making a tiny opening. Insert a guitar pick in the small gap, and remove the knife. Work the guitar pick around the case, popping open the plastic tabs until the two sides release.

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Be very careful removing the fiberglass plug

Step 2: Open the iPod
Open the sides slightly, identifying a fragile ribbon cable in the corner. Lift that cable out of its socket by its fiberglass plug; do not pull on the cable itself. Set the plastic front side away until reassembly.

Remove the three screws circled in red

Step 3: Remove the headphone jack
Use a tiny screwdriver—Phillips 0 or smaller—to remove the three screws holding the headphone circuit into the metal case. Leave the torx screws intact. Set this part aside.

Clean the iPod back thoroughly

Step 4: Clean the metal backing
Go over the iPod backing with some Soft Scrub to clean off any oils or grime. You'll have the best plating results with a clear surface.

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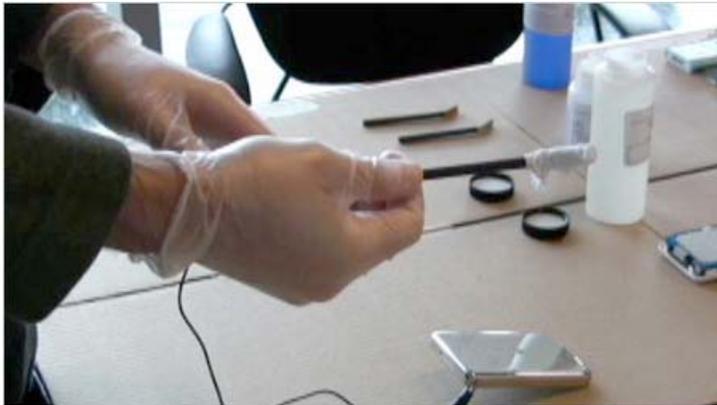
Be sure to cover the exposed metal completely with a cloth

Step 6: Prepare the wand

Wrap and tie a small strip of cotton cloth around the exposed metal end of the plating wand. (You'll use different wands for different kinds of plating. For example, gold uses a stainless steel wand, while copper uses a copper wand.) The strip should be about six inches long. Make it snug, but if it's too tight, it won't soak the plating solutions as well.
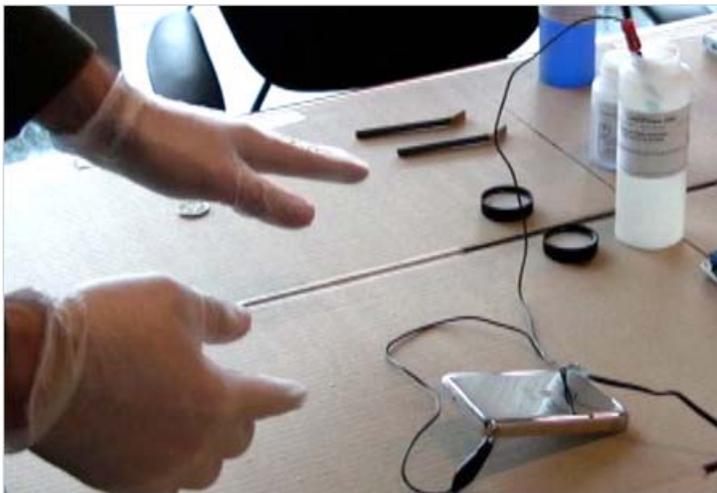
Don't mix up your chemicals

Step 7: Prepare the chemicals

Open your plating bottle (or bottles), and fill the cap with the solution. Soak the clean, un-used wand in the full bottle initially. But once you begin plating, don't dip back in the source; you could contaminated the remainder.

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Use a transformer. A direct connection to an outlet will kill you

Step 8: Hook up the iPod
Plug the transformer into the wall, and hook up its ends. Connect the negative
alligator clip to the iPod backing, and insert the positive end in the wand. The
transformer voltage also varies with the kind of plating; use 4.5 volts for copper or
gold.
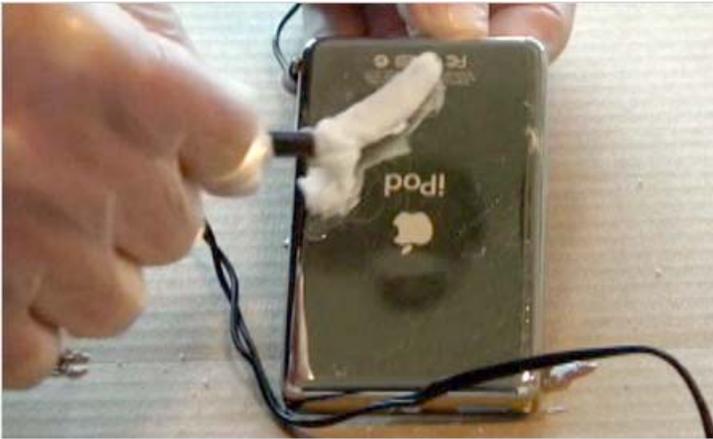
Rub on alchemy

Step 9: Plate it
Rub the wand with firm, but not excessive pressure on the iPod. Use small circular
strokes, but keep it moving so the iPod doesn't get burned. Test a patch on the
inside of the metal plate to practice, if desired. Soak up more of the solution about
every 45 seconds. Replace the cotton strip if it becomes dark and tarnished. Metals
like copper can be plated easily without any base coat. For best gold results, we
recommend plating a layer of copper, then a layer of nickel before plating gold. The
gold might not effectively plate directly to the iPod.