



CELEBRATING A 60-YEAR REIGN WITH THE ART OF FOIL STAMPING AND EMBOSSING

by Kym Conis



The year 2012 commemorated the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, a multi-national celebration marking the 60th anniversary of the accession of Queen Elizabeth II to the throne. Aside from the 63-year reign of Queen Victoria, Queen Elizabeth is the only other monarch in the history of the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other Commonwealth realms to have celebrated a Diamond Jubilee.

To mark the historic occasion, the Royal Canadian Mint produced an unprecedented commemorative, three-coin series made of pure silver. The first coin portrays the beauty of the young Queen Elizabeth II with her partner and consort Prince Philip Mountbatten. The second depicts the young Queen Elizabeth II adorned with a Cullinan diamond Swarovski crystal gemstone. The third coin in the set displays the royal cypher – a monarch’s identifier, much like a coat of arms.

Cyphers have been used by British royals since the time of Henry VIII. They generally feature the monarch’s initial and titles, often beneath a symbol of rule, such as a crown. Unlike monograms that interweave letters, royal cyphers display each letter distinctly. They are imprinted in the insignia of orders and on decorations, medals and badges.

In Canada – a constitutional monarchy that recognizes Her Majesty as its head of state – it is common for this cypher to be surrounded by a wreath or garland of maple leaves, symbolizing the unique union of the Queen’s power and the sovereignty of the Canadian people. It is this very design that Gravure Choquet Inc., Montreal, Quebec, chose to adorn the lavishly decorated cover of an outer box that would house the impressive three-coin series in its lacquered wooden casing.

Designing for the historic occasion

Intricate and ornate in design, the cypher features Queen Elizabeth II’s monogram, EIIR, foil stamped in bright silver and embossed. Her initials, E II (Elizabeth II), and her title initial, R (Regina, Latin for Queen), are centered below an image of St. Edward’s crown, also foil stamped and embossed in bright silver. The crown has been used for British coronations since the restoration of the monarchy and coronation of Charles II in 1661.

Surrounding the royal cypher is a glimmering garland of maple leaves, foil stamped in bright silver and over stamped in a silver holographic foil etched with a refractive pattern. In the center of the garland, the number “60” is foil stamped in holographic foil on top of a larger maple leaf that resides in the center of a diamond. The garland is embossed to further enhance the entire design, which is situated on a rich background of burgundy foil, finished with a border of silver holographic foil. UV coating provided the final touch, lending greater depth to the foil.



Gravure Choquet had produced a similar box 10 years ago for the 50th anniversary of the Golden Jubilee, although the finishing processes used at that time were less impressive. According to Patrick Choquet, Gravure Choquet president and owner, “For the 50th anniversary, the boxes were printed and then register embossed. On this production, our customer asked us to create an outstanding design with spectacular effects.” As the coins are collectors’ items specifically produced for the event, they demanded nothing less than high-quality packaging.

“The relationship with our customer was well established,” said Choquet. “You only can create such projects when there is a mutual trust between two parties.” Because Gravure Choquet has in-house design capabilities and produces its own stamping and embossing dies, the company is able to create exceptional pieces. “The combined craftsmanship of our designers, engravers and pressmen allows us to produce first-class jobs,” he continued.

Producing the royal carton

Before production began on the three-piece box set, a complete pre-production sample was produced for customer approval, which not only landed the order but also fine-tuned the steps. From plain sheet to final assembly, each production run took approximately three weeks to complete. Consisting of three pieces, the ornate box required 20 steps, from foil stamping and embossing to final gluing, hand assembly and shrink wrapping.

The top cover was foil stamped in bright silver, then metallic burgundy and finally in silver holographic foil using both textured and smooth patterns (in two passes). Next the cover was UV coated, then register embossed, diecut, scored, folded and glued over a 24pt. chipboard insert.

The tray was foil stamped in matte silver foil and over stamped with a maple leaf pattern in silver holographic foil. Next, it was diecut, scored, folded and glued. The bottom of the three-part box was foil stamped in bright silver and



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gloss black, spot UV coated, diecut, scored, folded and glued over a 24pt. chipboard insert. Both the top and bottom covers were produced on 12pt. SBS.

To ensure maximum quality and keep waste to a minimum, the boxes were run one-up on two Bobst SP 76BM foil stamping and embossing presses and diecut on the company's Kluge presses. The boxes were glued and assembled by hand and individually shrink wrapped. All processes were completed at Gravure Choquet, except the UV coating, which was produced at Super Lustre in Montreal.

Kurz Transfer Products supplied the hot stamping foils, and ITW Foils supplied the holographic foil. All of the copper stamping and embossing dies (flat, textured and sculptured embossing) were produced in-house at Gravure Choquet's engraving facility. "For 40 years, we have produced our own dies," explained Choquet. "We come from intaglio, and we had to make our own dies as the process required over 40 – 50 dies per day! Then, the dies were steel; today, we use copper."

One of the most challenging aspects of the job was maintaining the tight registration between stamping and embossing passes, as well as selecting the right foils to make sure they were compatible to each other and also to the UV. The final effect was hard to achieve, but constant vigilance on press allowed the company to achieve a spectacular effect.

According to Choquet, "The tight registration was well planned in our prepress department by putting proper trapping on the dies following the sequences of operation. On press, our press operators adjusted the stamping presses to achieve dead-on registration. Our presses are calibrated and adjusted all the time." As procedure, the company uses register marks at every step to validate the proper positioning. These register marks also indicate if there is movement throughout the run.

Choquet added, "Pre-testing was extremely important to the success of this job. Once tested, we followed the same recipe throughout the main production run." In total, Gravure Choquet produced three runs of 2,500 boxes and one production run of 9,000 smaller boxes that housed a single gold coin, also a part of the commemorative Diamond Jubilee collection.

In part, Choquet attributes the company's ability to achieve such high quality to the fact that its engravers are very active during the makeready process, fixing and fine-tuning the fit between stamping passes. When it comes to an embossing pass, they can alter the dies to get the best embossing without cracking in order to maximize the quality and the three-dimensional effects. "Our customers appreciate our ability to react quickly when we have an issue on the press," said Choquet. "This provides the opportunity to bring our presses to maximum speeds while maintaining the highest standards of quality."

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Additionally, the company's in-house machine shop is a great source for modifications of its processes and gives the print finisher a competitive edge. "Having this department in-house gives us the flexibility to tackle challenges and achieve spectacular outcomes that others might not attempt," said Choquet. "It is part of our culture; we do not have an issue with trying and exploring new avenues."

Gravure Choquet produces high-end fine stationery, folding boxes, prestige labels, commercial products, postage stamps and many other security documents. Specializing in trade finishing for printers and security printers all over North America, the company offers hot foil stamping, embossing, holograms, kiss-cutting, numbering, intaglio, variable foiling and scratch-off on a wide range of equipment, including Bobst, Kluge, Sheridan, Cronite, Heidelberg foil cylinders and many other specialty presses.

Working together for the art

Gravure welcomes the opportunity to work with its suppliers to develop their products. For instance, according to Choquet, the company has developed some nice features on Bobst stamping presses that are found on newer presses today. In the past, it has worked on feeding lightweight stocks, as well as on the foil system. "We currently are testing a prototype of vacuuming the foil out of the press and baling it," said

Choquet. "This was done in collaboration with the Swiss head office of Bobst in Lausanne."

The company also collaborates with Kurz Transfer Products to test its new foil products and assist the foil manufacturer with its marketing needs. "We love our industry and do everything possible to promote hot foil stamping and its brilliance," said Choquet. "It is much better than the conventional cold foiling process when we compare paper/carton jobs."

Receiving many accolades, the three-piece carton won first place in Packaging and Best of Show at the Gutenberg Contest in Canada, as well as a Gold Leaf Award in the category of Difficult Application on a Folding Carton in the 19th Annual FSEA Gold Leaf Awards Competition. "The job was very difficult and caused stress along each step," said Choquet, "but at every stage we were amazed by the beauty of the project."

"We always have promoted supplier relationships in order to bring the best possible quality to our products, which in turn, brings out the best in the art of foil stamping and embossing," concluded Choquet. And the elaborate, award-winning Diamond Jubilee package is indeed a prime example of the very best in foil stamping and embossing – an art form truly fit for the Queen. ■



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