

Leather Fact sheet / Shagreen

Shagreen / A Brief History

The word shagreen derives from the French chagrin (sorrow). Created from polished Stingray skins, shagreen is one of the most sophisticated and beautiful surfaces in the world.

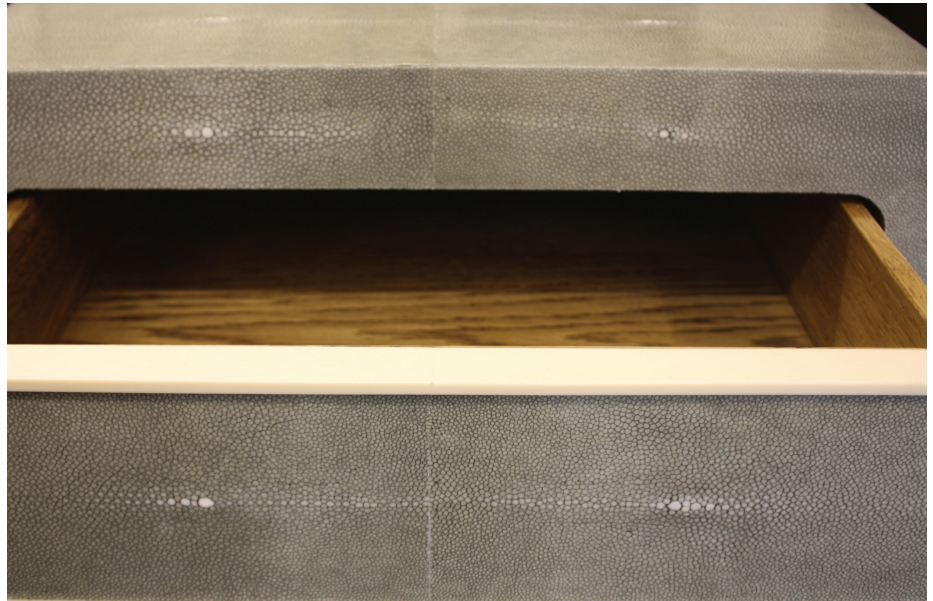
In the 17th and early 18th centuries, the term “shagreen” began to be applied to leather made from sharkskin or the skin of a rayfish (probably the pearled ray, *Hypolophus sepien*). This form is also termed sharkskin or galuchat.

The skins are naturally covered with round, closely set, calcified papillae called placoid scales, whose size is chiefly dependent on the age and size of the animal. These scales are ground down to give a roughened surface of rounded pale protrusions, between which the dye (again, typically green vegetable dye) shows when the material is coloured from the other side.

This latter form of shagreen was first popularised in Europe by Jean-Claude Galluchat (d. 1774), a master leatherworker in the court of Louis XV of France. It quickly became a fashion amongst the French aristocracy, and migrated throughout Europe by the mid-18th century. It was used as an accent in 18th Century British accessories and most famously, as a luxurious surface for French Art Deco furniture.

Shagreen was a decorative and durable surface for Japanese armour, its' unusually rough and granular surface made it an ideal material or used on the hilts and scabbards of swords and daggers, where slipperiness was a disadvantage. In Asia, the Japanese Tachi, Katana, and Wakizashi swords had their hilts almost always covered in undyed, untreated shagreen, while in China shagreen was traditionally used on Qing dynasty composite bows.

Dasyatidae are a family of rays and cartilaginous fish related to sharks. They are common in coastal waters throughout the world and are an important foodstuff in SE Asia. Stingray skins are a by-product of the fishing industry and the species *Dasyatis Bleekeri* and *Dasyatis Stephan* carry no CITES or other restrictions. They are not a threatened species in SE Asian waters.



Shagreen skins are measured and sold by the width of the skin across the centre of the eye (Large Scale)

As a guide a typical panel size from skin sizes are below.

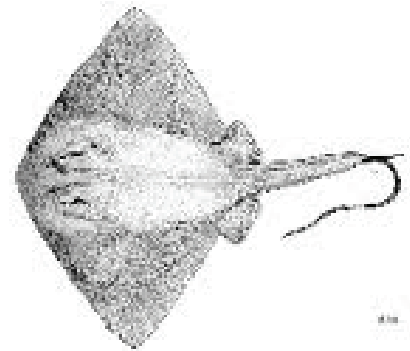
5” Wide = 5” Long x 3.5” (127 x 89 mm)

6” Wide = 6” Long x 4.5” (153 x 115 mm)

7” Wide = 7” Long x 5.5” (140 x 178 mm)

8” Wide = 8” Long x 6.5” (166 x 204 mm)

9” Wide = 9” Long x 7.5” skin width (191 x 230 mm)



Tanned shagreen skin.

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