

Solutions for the Workshop

by Kate Wolf

Sometimes, the problems and needs of a jeweler's workshop have cheap, simple solutions. Kate Wolf, who runs both a school, Workshops at Wolf Designs in Portland, Maine, and a tool company, Wolf Tools, shares some of the ones she's learned over her career.

Ice, Ice, Baby:

Keeping Your Wax Workable

Working with injection wax in a warm studio can be problematic. The wax gets gummy, becomes hard to carve, and distorts easily. You can solve the problem by putting ice in a medium size bowl and placing on top a smaller bowl holding the waxes to be worked (1). This keeps the injected waxes dry, chilly, and carveable.



Play-Doh Lends a Helping Hand

Jewelers spend a good bit of their time at the bench wishing they had a few more hands. Play-Doh helps. Use it to position and hold pieces of wax so you can melt them together without them shifting. Press the pieces to be bonded together

into the Play-Doh (2). Draw a hot wax pen through the surface of the wax to bond it (don't go all the way through the wax to the clay, because you don't want to mix clay in with the molten wax). Gently pry the wax out of the clay, turn it over, and melt through the rest of the seam.

Hold It!

Broom clamps, usually used in utility closets, are handy for storing torches when they're not in use (3). The torch snaps into the clamp, which grips it securely. You can also use broom clamps to hold ring mandrels.



Scrubbing Up a Finish — With a Toothbrush

It seems jewelers spend an inordinate amount of time putting a high polish on jewelry, even though the finish won't hold up long enough for the

customer to walk out of the store. A shiny matte finish is a favorite: It shows off the form and fine detail, and has a bright sheen to make your customer happy. A glass bead blasting will give you this finish, but you can also try this low-tech method: Use a toothbrush dipped in water and baking soda to scrub a piece of jewelry. (4)



Under Wraps (to Keep Files Sharp)

To keep files from rubbing against each other and dulling when transporting them, roll them up in plastic window screening (5). Secure the roll with rubber bands. The screening is lightweight, compact, and affordable.

Faux Granulation with Plastic Beads

This is one of my favorite techniques for adding decorative patterns to wax. Make sure the piece is totally done, hollow, and smooth, and then

apply dental retention beads, available from dental suppliers (6). These plastic spheres burn out cleanly and are quite small. Arrange the spheres by size on a stone sorting tray, using a small, damp paintbrush to move them around. Cut a groove for the spheres with an onglette graver (7). Fill the groove in with Wicked Sticky Positioning Wax (8),



which was designed for purposes such as this. Wipe off excess. Use a damp paintbrush to transfer the spheres to the sticky wax (9) and press the spheres into it. Cast!



In the jungles of backyard Salinas, California, my sister and I prowled the terrain, eagle-eyed, hunting for precious stones locked away inside ordinary-looking rocks. We spent hours digging and examining. The layers of sedimentary stones fascinated me; each had a different color, sometimes a different texture, always a different shape and slope than the ones above or below it. I knew that whatever I did when I grew up would be somehow tied to those stones.

For years, I hungrily absorbed everything I could about gemstones and the metals shaped around them. I explored how jewelers through the ages have put their pieces together and discovered the difference between artistry and expedience. That discovery fuels my design.

I want my designs to be so completely individual that each one projects its own message and purpose. I want it to draw gasps and wide-eyed amazement. To invite thought and ignore any boundary of what wearable art is and—always—to forge

new pathways
into the future.

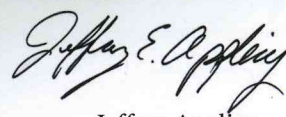


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