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THE ART OF THE BEAD

Four designers showcase their unique approaches



COMMUNICATING IN
TODAY'S BUSINESS WORLD

THE FINDINGS CHOICE:
BUY, MAKE, OR MODIFY?

Finding the Perfect Fit

Deciding whether to use a purchased finding, modify one, or make your own is often a very personal choice. A group of jewelers share their approaches to working with findings.

BY SHANNON COURNOYER

Findings, those often minute components that jewelers work with every day, are integral parts of a jewelry piece. But sometimes the settings, bails, and clasps that you purchase from a supplier require modifications to make them ideal in function and style. Other times, a pre-made finding just won't do, and you have to make your own.

Deciding whether to use a purchased finding, modify one, or make your own is often a very personal choice. "For me, the decision of whether to make or buy a

finding generally depends on how 'important' the piece of jewelry is and how complex and time-consuming it will be to fabricate the finding," says designer Cynthia Eid of Arlington, Massachusetts. "If it is a quick, inexpensive piece, I am more likely to use a commercial finding. More complex and expensive pieces will usually have handmade findings."

Choosing the best approach is often a matter of achieving a balance between numerous factors, including cost, time, durability, and beauty.

MEANINGFUL MODS

Arthur Anton Skuratowicz of The Jewelry Training Center (JTC) in Colorado Springs, Colorado, hails from a retail background and describes himself as an artist teaching from the commercial side. While ordering findings is part of the curriculum at JTC, so are modifying a purchased finding and manufacturing one, both in case the item the student needs doesn't exist or isn't available in time. "The reality is that when you're in a retail store, you're glued

Michael David Sturlin's clasps often become "the main design element of the jewelry object," he says. "From my perspective, designing, fabricating, and assembling all of the components into a complete item of jewelry is what distinguishes a custom jewel from a commercial jewel."



to your findings book, but sometimes you have to make a customer happy and modify an existing finding or create something new," says Skuratowicz. "It is important to understand the quirks of findings to do either task well."

Ordering findings from a supplier isn't always as simple as it might sound. For example, when setting a marquise stone, you may have to order a few settings to see which one fits and then make modifications, says Skuratowicz. Or, when doing a

partial bezel setting with two crescents, instead of ordering the partial bezel, he suggests ordering one tall, tapered, complete bezel, which offers more leeway with size. "Scallop out the inside with a saw blade to make it a partial bezel," he says. "You can customize this even more by leaving a taller bezel to protect the stone for an active customer."

When teaching students how to work

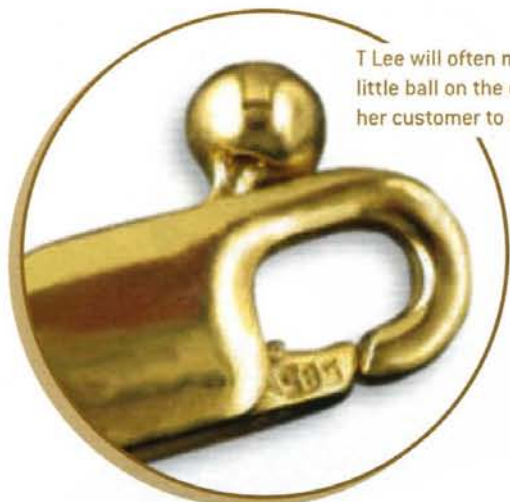
with custom-shaped stones, GIA instructor Mark Maxwell often finds himself modifying existing findings to get the job done. "It's pretty common to take an oversize head or a different shape head and adapt it for the stone," he says. With a "roval," a mostly round stone, he suggests using a round head, then pulling it in to fit the stone. "Doing it all from scratch is a lot more time consuming."

This labor savings is an important consideration for the bottom line at any

shop. “Pure fabrication is always the best method, but when you’re in a volume manufacturing position, you need to always balance cost to the customer and how long you want to tie up your craftsman,” says Jeff Johnson, president of the Johnson Family Diamond Cellar in

way we do it,” she says.

And there may be no better time than the present to brush up on different methods for modifying findings, as consumers in increasing numbers look to recycle and re-style their old jewelry. “In the current economy, I’m hearing that



T Lee will often modify a finding to improve function: She welded a little ball on the end of this lobster claw clasp to make it easier for her customer to pull the thumb trigger back.

Dublin, Ohio. “You need to ask if full custom is really what your customer needs or wants, and ask yourself how many you can do in a year.

“You can work with manufactured findings, have just as good of a job, and save the customer money.”

For example, Johnson says that you can easily alter a bail. “Let’s say we want it a little thinner in the profile; you simply file it down. If it has straight sides and you want a little curve for more sex appeal, curve it. The craftsman can use stock parts to come up with custom designs, but this knowledge comes with experience.”

When she uses a purchased finding, designer T Lee of Minneapolis will often modify it to improve function. One innovation is basic but brilliant: She welds a little ball on the end of a lobster claw clasp to make it easier for her customer to pull the thumb trigger back. “If a finding can be modified faster than handmade and still be a dependable product, that’s the

business isn’t dropping off but shifting,” says Johnson. “Customers are having jewelry rebuilt or redone, having changes made to pieces.” They might add stones, such as color to a brooch, or add an additional design element. This is a great opportunity to work with purchased findings—with alterations.

CLEVER CREATIONS

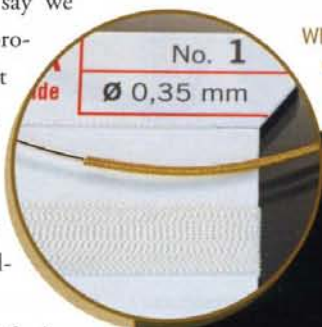
Depending on the type of jewelry you make, sometimes even a modified finding won’t meet your needs. Designer Michael David Sturlin of Scottsdale, Arizona, created his own clasp design to accommodate his signature crochet necklaces. The mechanical

box clasp allows three strands of crochet chain to lay flat on the neck. He fabricates the clasp from three parallel sections of tubing, with the center walls pierced away to form the housing for the tongue of the clasp.

In addition to the box clasp, he has modified the traditional toggle. In his version, the toggle bars snap into a hooked stirrup like two bent tines of a fork. The design allows his double-strand crochet necklaces to lie flat on the neck while supporting the weight of the very large centerpiece of the necklace.

Sturlin’s clasps often become “the main design element of the jewelry object,” he says. “From my perspective, designing, fabricating, and assembling all of the components into a complete item of jewelry is what distinguishes a custom jewel from a commercial jewel.”

Sturlin teaches students in his goldsmithing classes to make their own findings. “This enables the student to realize that these purposeful and necessary components are simple objects that are practical to make,” he says. The four main considerations he takes into account while designing clasps and findings are: com-



When Zaffiro Goldsmithing Studio started getting strung necklaces back when the end wrap oxidized and broke down, the design duo began making its own end wraps from 22k French coil wire to avoid the problem.



Ann Cahoon handcrafts each end cap and hook clasp for her loop-in-loop chains to be historically correct findings. "I find that this particular approach also suits my work in terms of longevity," she says.



handmade chain is an investment that is often worn daily. By manufacturing my own findings, I have a level of control over their quality and function that I consider critically important."

Regardless of your philosophy about using purchased findings versus making your own, sometimes handmade findings are born out of necessity. When T Lee just couldn't find the right color match for her 18k palladium white gold line, she had no other choice but to make her own findings. "Matching all the varied colors of white with an appropriate finding is always a problem," she says, so she creates simple, durable clasps for the line that are as basic as possible with no moving parts that can wear out.

fort, appearance, functionality, and reliability. "The order can vary depending on the nature and function of the jewelry, but each of these considerations is equally important," he says.

Sharing a similar philosophy about clasp design is designer Ann Cahoon of

Flying Marquis Studio in Ashby, Massachusetts, who specializes in the ancient art of loop-in-loop chain making. She handcrafts an end cap and hook clasp to be a historically correct finding. "I find that this particular approach also suits my work in terms of longevity," she says. "A

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Or take the example at Zaffiro Goldsmithing Studio in Portland, Oregon, where designers Jack and Elizabeth Gualtieri make their own end wraps for strung beads. "We were getting stringings back when the end wrap oxidized and broke down," says Jack. "We now make our own end wraps from 22k French coil wire to avoid this problem." He says it took him a while to find a draw plate that would make wire that fine, but it has made a difference in the quality of their jewelry.

And in the end, that's what it comes down to: the quality of wear, as well as of the design. For such small items, findings can have a significant impact on the final piece of jewelry. Whether choosing wisely from ready-made products, modifying them for specific needs, or creating their own, jewelers always keep that in mind—and keep searching until they find that perfect fit. ♦

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