

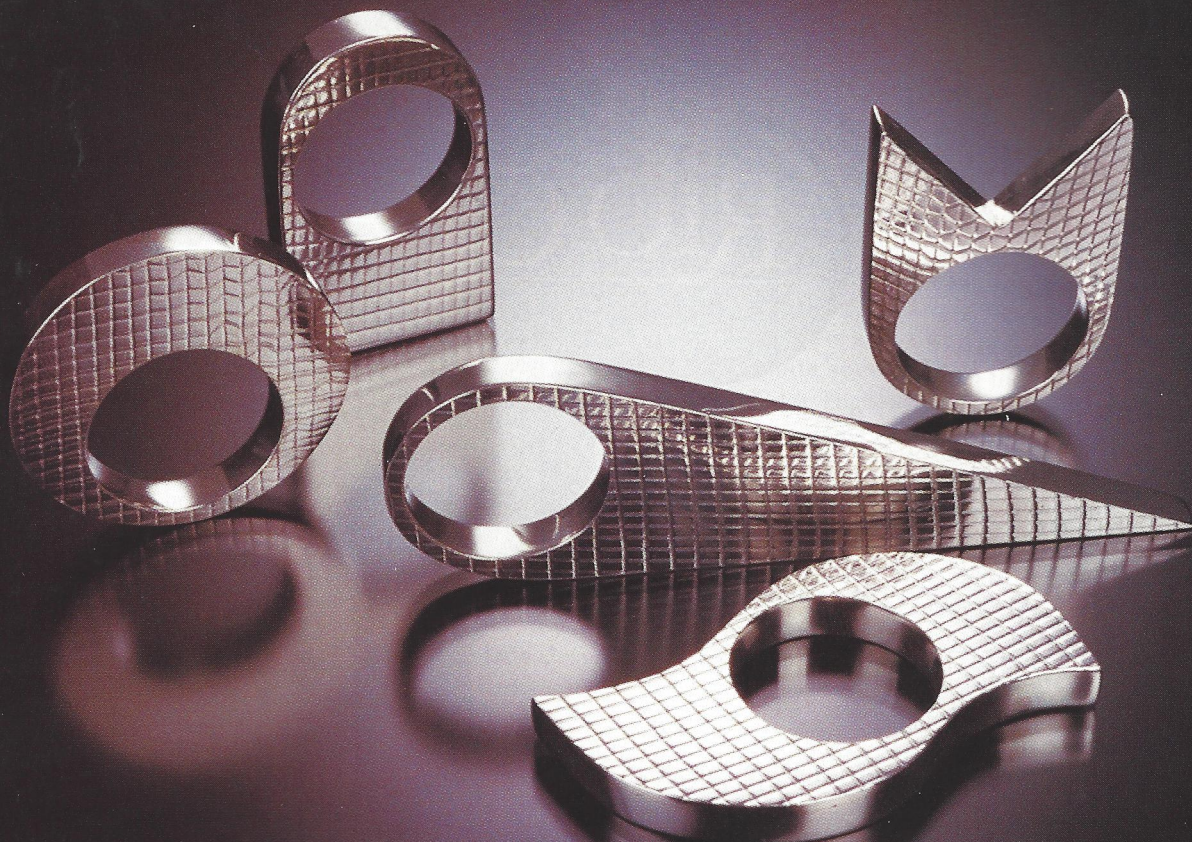
Left: Fold-formed sterling silver pin by Cynthia Wiig, who calls silver "one of my first loves." 1 7/8" x 1 1/8". Photo: Ric Noyle.

Bottom: A collection of sterling silver rings by Jennifer Bowie. Bowie finds that silver attracts buyers who aren't afraid to experiment. Photo: R. Diamante.

This month in Jewelry Journal, Lori Bugaj gives step-by-step instructions for making a "Jingle Bell Rock Pin," page 67, and Cynthia Wiig makes "Hand-Forged Ginkgo Fan Earrings," page 76.

SILVER

FOR CONTEMPORARY JEWELRY DESIGNERS, SILVER HAS





Left: Cynthia Wiig has started working with kuem-boo, burnishing gold foil onto silver for an expanded color palette. From the Merging Metals series, these Ginko Fan earrings are oxidized with sterling silver and 24K gold foil. 1 1/4" x 7/8". Photo: Ric Noyle.

Below: For Lenka Suchanek, silver's flexibility is essential to the work she does. She created this Spanish Fan based on Punto de España lace, using fine silver and gold-plated copper. 14" x 7". Photo: Lenka Suchanek.

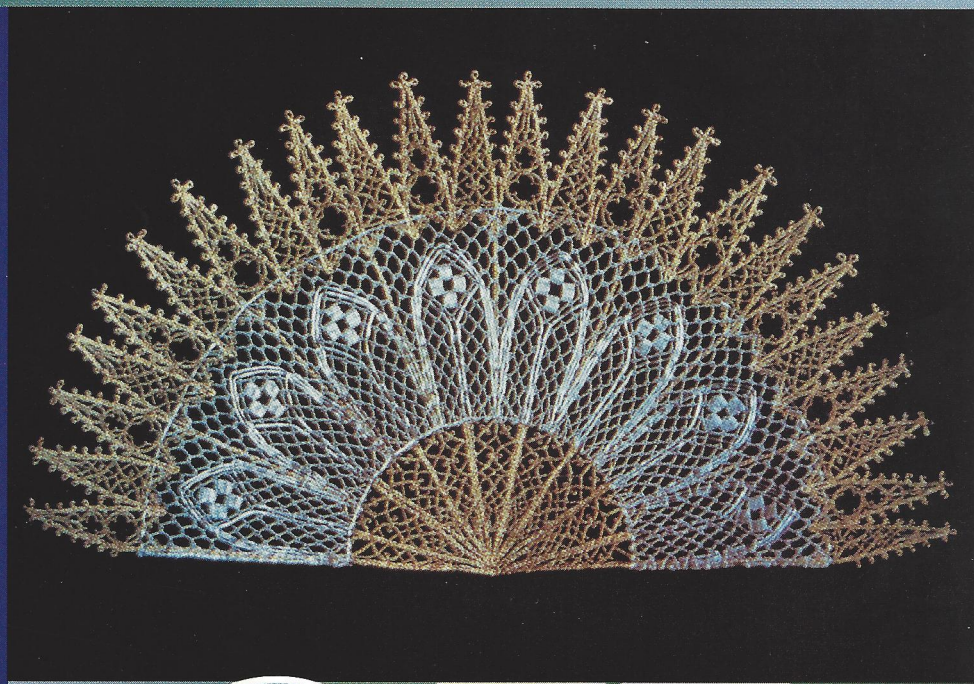
SHOWS

A LOT MORE GOING FOR IT THAN SIMPLE ECONOMICS.

At some time or another, virtually every jewelry artist works in silver.

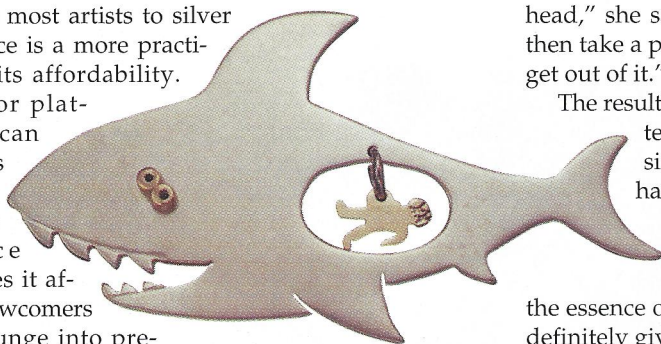
It's not just that silver is beautiful — although its color and luster have enchanted people since the earliest stirrings of civilization. It's not simply that silver is versatile — although silver does permit a variety of patination and finishing techniques that offer artists an array of looks to choose from. And it's not even just that silver is easy to work — although silver is highly malleable and can be formed into virtually any shape the mind can conceive.

BY SUZANNE WADE



OFF

What sends most artists to silver in the first place is a more practical matter — its affordability. Unlike gold or platinum, which can cost hundreds of dollars an ounce, silver's \$5-an-ounce price tag makes it affordable for newcomers to take the plunge into precious metals and gives experienced artists the freedom to experiment.



Once artists discover silver, the metal's other fine qualities often keep them hooked. Although some dream of the day when they can afford to create exclusively in gold, for many others, working in silver is more than a marriage of convenience — it's a lifelong love affair.

"I really like silver," says Honolulu, Hawaii, designer Cynthia Wiig. "I may work in gold because people say that's how you pay your bills, but I think silver will always be one of my first loves."

Wiig consciously selected silver as her medium of expression when she started her jewelry business in 1994. "When I first chose a business name I called myself a silversmith because I wanted to," she says. "I wasn't able to afford gold, and I didn't want to feel that I had to cover the whole spectrum of the jewelry field, so I set this limitation."

Since then, Wiig has begun experimenting with gold, but most frequently turns to silver when the creative juices start flowing. "One of the major reasons I like working in silver is the freedom of experimentation," she says. "I think partly it's because I feel freer because of the cost factor, but I also really love working in silver."

Over the years, Wiig has twisted silver, hammered it, oxidized it, and folded it. Her first commercial success was with a line of earrings and pendants in sterling silver wire, while in recent years, Wiig has begun experimenting with the techniques of keum-boo and fold forming to create an entirely new body of work.

"I really love fold forming," she says. "The scoring and bending technique is very elegant. It's labor intensive, but very satisfying."

Incorporating keum-boo, in which the artist burnishes gold foil onto fine silver, also allowed her to expand her color palette. "[The gold foil] adds a kind of warmth," she says. "[Keum-boo] has a different presence than just sterling. What I've chosen to do is take some of the work I'd done strictly in sterling silver with the fold-forming technique, and prepared the sheet metal prior to fold forming with keum-boo, which then adds just a little touch of elegance."

Wiig has also experimented extensively with hammered textures, sometimes altering her tools just to see what happens. "What I tell individuals who look at these things and wonder, 'How do you do that?' is to get to know the tools that you have, and don't be afraid to change the hammer

head," she says. "[Make changes], smooth the rough edges, then take a piece of copper and hit it — and just see what you get out of it."

The results of these experiments have ranged from bamboo-textured pieces to a series of sunset/moonrise designs inspired by the play of light on the ocean. "I have the good fortune of living by the ocean and I've grown up by the ocean, so I think it's embedded in my consciousness," she says. "I don't create literal imagery — I prefer to have the essence of something rather than making a wave — but it definitely gives the feel of the ocean."

Wiig says she certainly isn't done experimenting. "I think experimenting keeps [jewelry making] fun," she says. "There's a certain amount of repetition in what we do, especially if you're doing this for your livelihood. Being able to duplicate something makes it more feasible to pay the bills. But experimenting keeps it from becoming boring. So I'll do repetitious things, and then take some time to play."

Nor does she feel she has exhausted silver's potential. "There are so many possibilities," she says. "I haven't even activated my casting equipment, and that's a whole other direction. I do a lot of work with textures, and I'm enjoying working with more of a three-dimensional form. I'd love to do anticlastic raising, but I haven't gone that route yet. I just hope I live long enough to be able to try it all!"

J U S T H A V I N G F U N .

"Silver is a fun metal to work with," says Lori Bugaj of One-Eyed Collie Jewelry Design in San Francisco. "I think it's the clean, crisp color that I like the most, but I also like what I can do with the metal. You can antique it, you can make it shiny, you can make it matte — and people respond to it."

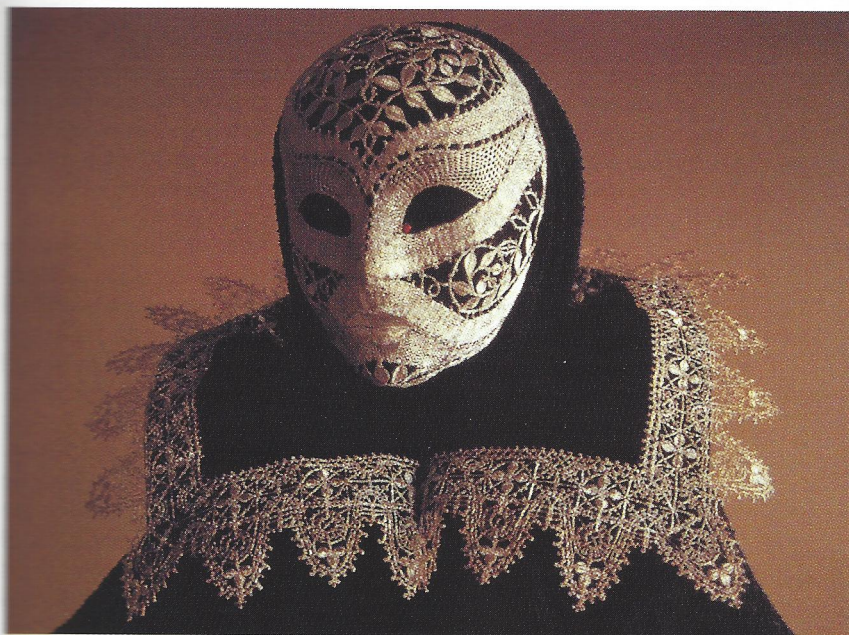
Having fun is important to Bugaj, who combines silver with accents in other metals and gemstones to create whimsical designs with a punchline, such as her *Swimming with the Sharks* pin, featuring a man swallowed by a grinning shark. "I've had a lot of lawyers say 'I just have to have that pin,'" she says. "The humor is so important to me because before I got into metalsmithing I was in the business world — first as a computer consultant and then a marketing director — and people take things so seriously. I found I was the one always trying to lighten things up. So this is my way of telling people it's okay to laugh at yourself and it's okay to have fun."

Bugaj creates these comic pieces primarily in silver partly to keep them affordable, but also because she finds silver can show many faces. "I like the fact that you can make it look many different ways," she says, noting that the wide variety of finishes possible on silver makes it possible to capture an exact mood. "I finish [my pieces] based on the feeling I want," she explains. "For my *Hungry Animals* [line], I wanted a matte finish because I feel that texture is more representative of natural forms and animal forms. On the shark, it looks like sharkskin, and on the dog, you can imagine it looking like hair."

On other pieces, she uses antiquing to show tiny details. "I have a line of little animal charms — quarter-inch by

"SILVER IS WORTH SOMETHING, AND IT KNOWS IT, BUT IT'S NOT SNOTTY. SILVER CAN BE MAGNIFICENT AND, AT THE SAME TIME, BE COMPLETELY HUMBLE."

half-inch dogs and cats with expressions on their faces," she says. "The antiquing helps bring those [expressions] out." On other pieces, such as her sterling silver leaves and teapots, she combines antiquing with high polish, applying antiquing solution to tiny details with a paintbrush.



Bugaj also likes the way silver combines with copper or brass accents. "I do some pieces that are only silver, but for the more whimsical pieces where I want a certain aspect to stand out, I need different colors, and different metals for accents. For example, with the *Hungry Animals*, the primary line has copper eyes and copper prey," she says. "I think silver works well, especially with copper. When copper begins to take on a patina, it starts to become a little more orange. Combined with the silver, they just make each other stand out a little more."

Although Bugaj has started to experiment with working in gold, she sees silver as continuing to play a large role in her creative efforts. "I really think ahead of time about the materials that I use to get different feelings for the piece," she says. "Silver is a very affordable precious metal for people, and it's very contemporary. I like to think of my designs as contemporary, but not so far out that they won't be worn and kept in the family for many years."

A LACE RENAISSANCE.

For Lenka Suchanek, it's silver's flexibility that makes the metal ideal for expressing her creative impulses. "Silver is wonderful to work with because it's very soft and very malleable," she says — a must in creating the delicate silver lace designs she specializes in.

Suchanek is a fiber artist by training. Growing up in western Bohemia, she was exposed at an early age to the region's long tradition of lace making; as an adult, she continued her studies throughout Europe, studying the lace-making techniques of Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and England.

Suchanek made the move into silver eight years ago, translating her lace-making skills

into jewelry. "I always wanted to do three dimensions," she says. "In fiber it's very difficult to make three-dimensional structures sturdy enough to stand on their own, so I experimented with different materials and found wire is wonderful. Silver wire is very soft and very malleable; it creates stitches very easily, but it still obtains three dimensions."

Suchanek creates her silver lace jewelry using the same techniques as fiber lace, which involve weaving a lace pattern around pins on a pillow. "The technique itself is slower, because wire doesn't naturally stretch, so it doesn't twist as easily and it doesn't fall in place as fiber does," Suchanek says. "But the stitches are mostly the same as lace making with fiber."

Suchanek soon discovered she wasn't the first to have the idea of creating lace out of wire. "Early Renaissance lace of the 16th century was actually made of wire," she says. "My favorite lace technique is early Italian lace of the 16th century and also *Punto de España* — Spanish points — of the 16th and 17th centuries. These were both made in metal, both gold and silver."

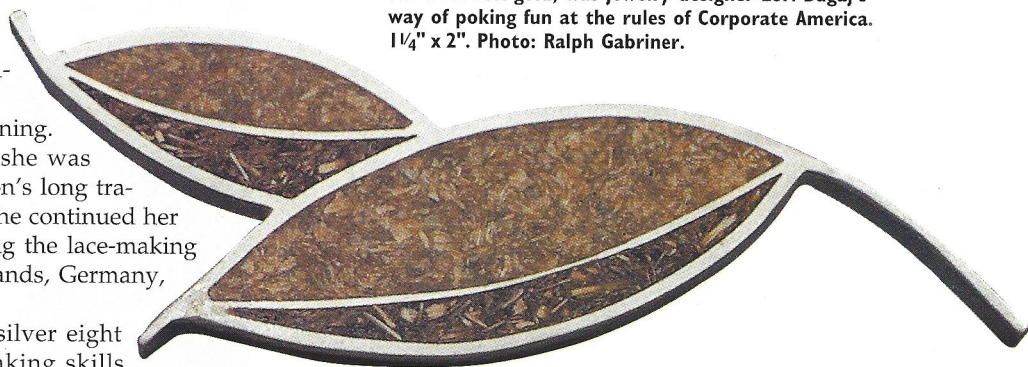
Few, if any, examples of these silver and gold laces survive, however. Although the craftsmen who created precious-metal lace chose their materials to make a luxury product that would last a lifetime, the value of the materials eventually proved to be the artworks' greatest enemy. "After the fashion of lace in gold and silver was over, people destroyed the laces to reuse the metal," says Suchanek. "The laces that were made later in thread survive, but we have almost nothing of the Renaissance. It was the value of the metal that brought death to those pieces of lace."

With neither examples nor living craftsmen to learn from, Suchanek has developed her own techniques by studying Renaissance paintings and ancient books of lace patterns. "The biggest source to study how [silver and gold laces] might have looked are old paintings. The Renaissance masters were wonderful painters and could really paint the details. And laces are often described in old books," she says, including

Above: Lenka Suchanek's *Mysterious Lace* mask and collar, of fine silver, based on 16th-Century Italian lace. Life size. Photo: Kenji Nagai.

Below: Karen Christians finds that silver's simplicity works well with the natural objects she uses in her designs. *Tea Leaves* brooch, of sterling silver, tea leaves, and hops. 3" x 1/2" x 1". Photo: Frank Kavanagh.

Opposite page: *Swimmin' with the Sharks*, of sterling silver with 18K gold, was jewelry designer Lori Bugaj's way of poking fun at the rules of Corporate America. 1 1/4" x 2". Photo: Ralph Gabrinier.





Jennifer Bowie's *All the Bells and Whistle*, of sterling silver. Photo: R. Diamante.

Below right: For *Majestic Orchid*, of fine and sterling silver and garnet, Lori Bugaj was inspired by the orchids that her husband collects. 1½" x 1½". Photo: Hap Sakwa.

her favorite reference, a book featuring numerous woodcuts of lace patterns first published in Venice in 1556.

Although through such research she can learn what the laces of the Renaissance looked like, there is little information on how they were created. "The [1556] book includes only woodcuts, so there are no instructions on how to make the lace," she says. "There's no indication of pin placement, and pins are crucial in lace: they mark the important points and they hold the lace as it's being made on the pillow. So there I have to rely on my experience, and the laces I've seen in collections."

While Suchanek is inspired by the work of the old masters, she does not restrict herself to simple copies. "Although many lace makers may limit themselves to the techniques of their country of origin, I was able to study so many laces in so many countries, I don't feel bound by tradition as much," she says. "So I use patterns as I need them. I don't base the works on patterns — I design the works, draw a sketch, and then I look for suitable patterns to use to fill the lace. So I may mix in one piece laces from France and Germany and Italy. They would never have met before, but in my pieces they do."

The results are complex, delicate brooches and "neck laces" that demand close examination to appreciate their minute details. "Usually when people see a piece, they come really close and start to study it and inspect it," she says. "At first glance, they cannot understand how the structure holds together, yet is so airy and so transparent. They are intrigued

and quite surprised at this technique that can create such a delicate, but still bold pattern."

As Suchanek has mastered the ancient techniques of lace making, she has also made it a priority to teach them to others. "There's an [unwritten] rule that every lace maker in her or his lifetime must teach at least another 10 people," she explains, *an obligation intended to ensure that the tradition is passed on to another generation.* "So I teach lace making with fiber and with wire, and I have many requests for classes for wire lace making." Curious lace makers can also learn more about making lace through her Web site, <http://www.silverpinstudio.com>, where she offers a step-by-step explanation of the creation of one of the brooches featured on the site.

"I feel lace making is a matter of fine craft and should be part of life," she concludes. "In my sculptures, [wire] pictures, and jewelry, I am creating pieces that will be seen and will be enjoyed every day, so I do not limit myself just to the techniques of the past. I use the techniques to express myself and to express some of my ideas."

TRADITIONAL SILVER.

Tradition also inspires the silver pieces created by Jennifer Bowie of Metalwerx in Woburn, Massachusetts. "Silver is the traditional metal of ritual object making," she explains. "I suppose if you lived in ancient Thracia, you made the object out of gold. But particularly with Jewish ritual objects, there's a tremendous amount of silver."

Bowie's work ranges from contemporary ring designs to traditional Jewish ritual objects. Although she occasionally works with copper and brass, silver remains her chosen metal. "There's something about silver that reminds me of moonlight," she says. "Copper has its place and brass has its place, but there's something shimmery and flowing like water [about silver]. It gives [the piece] a sort of peaceful, moonlit quality that I really like."

She concentrates on fabricating techniques such as piercing and forming. "I love that Bonny Doon press," she exclaims. "I think some of it has to do with my training. I was trained in a lot of traditional fabricating techniques — cutting, piercing, construction — and that just has to do with my



“THE PEOPLE WHO ARE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING A LITTLE UNUSUAL AREN'T AFRAID TO LOOK AT SILVER. PEOPLE WHO WANT THE STATUS QUO GO TO THE JEWELRY STORE IN THE MALL.”

experience thus far. I'm learning new techniques, but metal-smithing is 5,000 years old and you're never going to learn every aspect of it. I tend to stick with what I'm good at, and I'm pretty good at fabricating because that's the way my mind works.”

She tends to stick with silver for her ritual objects for equally practical reasons. “Gold is not well suited for certain kinds of functional objects: it's just too soft. Gold chalices are beautiful, but you'd beat [one] up in a month,” she says. “Silver is much better suited for functional work, everyday-type objects, objects that are going to see real use.”

For her jewelry, silver keeps her items in a price range most of her customers can afford. “You can make something very beautiful and still keep it below the skyline in terms of pricing,” she explains. “It does attract somewhat of an unusual crowd — the people who are looking for something a little unusual aren't afraid to look at silver. People who want the status quo go to the jewelry store in the mall.”

“For all its flash, silver is an unassuming metal,” she adds, “because it's inexpensive, it's readily available, and it's unpretentious. Platinum is the same color, but please . . . platinum is all about the rare, the unexpected, the perception of value. Silver is worth something, and it knows it, but it's not snotty. Silver can be magnificent and, at the same time, be completely humble.”



Left: Freud's Dream VII, by Karen Christians, of sterling silver, 14K gold, and pearls. 4" x 1/2" x 1".
Photo: Frank Kavanagh.
Above right: Suchanek's Chantilly NeckLace of fine silver (oxidized) and freshwater pearls; based on Chantilly lace patterns. 7" x 8" x 1 1/2". **Photo:** Kenji Nagai.



TEXTURE & COLOR.

Bowie's partner, Karen Christians, also uses silver as her primary palette, combining the white metal with a variety of resins and natural substances. For example, her line of tea pins combines silver with actual tea leaves for a surprising variety of color.

“The silver makes a nice color impact against the resin-filled tea. The earth tones work well with silver,” she says. “Silver has a coolness, and there are particular tones that go with it. I think a lot of what makes Southwestern jewelry really sing is the blues and greens and turquoise that really match with the coolness of silver.”

Christians also likes the simplicity and appearance of creating a matte finish on silver. “I do a lot of roller printing in my work,” she explains. “By raising a bed of fine silver on the top, I can do just a brass brush finish on it. I've yet to really polish those pieces: treated correctly they just polish once and that's that, and there's something about that texture that really talks to me.”

As a teacher of jewelry making, she also appreciates silver's metalsmithing qualities. “Silver is a very forgiving metal,” she says. “It's easy to cut, easy to file — it's a softer metal, especially sterling — it's just nice. It polishes nicely when you polish it, files nice, and just has a nice feel in my hand.”

But although silver can be a delight to work with, it can also challenge your metalsmithing skills, she says. “Silver makes a technically better metalsmith because of the quirky

Continued on page 66

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Silver Shows Off...

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temperatures, because of how things flow and connect and go together," she says. "[Silver also] allows you to go larger, to have more volume than gold, and that makes you a good all-around metalsmith. You're not confined to doing very small jewelry."

In her own work, Christians is moving more and more towards gold, primarily because it's easier to get a price commensurate with the labor involved in a gold piece. But when salability ceases to be a factor, silver continues to be the metal she reaches for. "For my sculptural work, there is no way I would do that in gold," she says. "Silver is the correct material — it gives the right luster, and the right malleability that I need." ♦

The artists whose work is shown in this article may be contacted as follows: Cynthia Wiig, P.O. Box 10611, Honolulu, HI 96816, ocean@hawaii.rr.com; Lori Bugaj, One-Eyed Collie, (415) 999-0818, lekjh@earthlink.net; Lenka Suchanek, (604) 430-8900, www.silverpinstudio.com; Jennifer Bowie and Karen Christians, Metalwerx, (781) 937-3532, www.metalwerx.com.

Suzanne Wade is has written about the gem and jewelry industry for more than eight years. Formerly editor/associate publisher of AJM Magazine, she is now a part-time freelance writer and full-time mom.

Cynthia Wiig



Lori Bugaj



Lenka Suchanek



Jennifer Bowie



Karen Christians



Suzanne Wade



In the Workshop...

(continued from page 59)

on the surface of the metal creates just this sort of barrier between the oxygen and the copper.

The traditional fire scale preventative compound is a saturated solution of granular boric acid in denatured alcohol. To use it, heat the metal slightly and dip it into the boric acid solution, then flame off the alcohol; repeat this three times, then proceed with soldering. (Boric acid doesn't interfere with the soldering; in fact, it's a compound in some of the fluxes used for soldering.) Several commercial products are available, under trade names such as Cupronil™ or Stop-Ox™. Paste flux, containing borax, is also useful as a fire scale preventative, but it doesn't have the covering power of a boric acid compound.

After soldering is complete and you place your piece in the pickle, it will take a bit longer to dissolve the glaze left by the fire scale preventative than it takes just to clean off other residue. You can help speed up the process by making the pickle solution very warm.

Caution: neither antirfluxes nor heat sinks are fire scale preventatives. You must make a choice on which technique will be best for your particular soldering situation, since you cannot use both an antirflux and a fire scale preventative in the same place (mixing the two solutions allows them to react and renders both useless). They can, however, be used in different areas on the same piece. Theoretically, using a heat sink prevents the area from getting to the temperature where fire scale forms, but again, this is not infallible.

Fire scale requires time and effort no matter how you approach it: initially in preventing it, later in removing it, or by creating an even coating as a finish. The choice is simply in where and when you put the time and effort. ♦

Sara M. Sanford is a professional jeweler and founding member and past president of the Creative Metal Arts Guild in Portland, Oregon. Her detailed examination of soldering in Lapidary Journal so far includes: "Soldier," December 1998; "Flux," April 1999; "The Heat Is On," July 1999; "Fit and Cleanliness," September 1999; "Soldier Joints and Placement," December 1999; "Steady Soldering," February 2000; "Basic Soldering Tools," May 2000; and "Drawing Heat Away," October 2000.

Sara M. Sanford

