How to Read This Book

The projects in this book have been written and re-written while I was teaching them over an entire year, at my studio and other places in the world. The students' contribution to this book is invaluable. Even if you choose not to make all the projects, I recommend reading them all in the order in which they are presented, since techniques in later projects rely on techniques introduced in earlier ones. This includes the information introduced in sidebars. The book starts with a technique that is used in almost all the other projects, then advances from simple techniques to more and more complicated ones. Some projects combine techniques that were demonstrated in earlier projects.

My blog, www.hadarjacobson.com/blog, should be regarded as a companion to this book. The book does not address firing issues, since the information on this topic tends to change rapidly. On the blog you will find ongoing discussions and updates on these issues. The blog also features an Instruction Manual that includes all you need to know about firing, the nature of metal clay, the firing process, firing boxes, carbon, programming instructions, compatibility charts, testing instructions, a checklist, and firing schedules that have been proven to work with most brands of metal clay. The Instruction Manual is updated on a regular basis, and a message is sent to blog subscribers with every update.

The advent of the different metal clays opened up a world of possibilities for playing with colors. My first instinct was to study polymer clay techniques and apply them to metal clay. I soon realized that in most cases this doesn't work. This is due to three main differences between the two media: 1. consistency, 2. range of colors, and most important – 3. alloying: the fact that metal clay is fired at high temperature causes some alloying between adjacent metals, and the colors seen before firing may be very different from those seen after firing, to the point that the technique used does not accomplish its goal. I had to give up on certain color patterns that are possible in polymer clay, and achieve other patterns using different techniques. Stretching and expanding, for example, is vastly used in polymer clay, but in metal clay it will cause "bleeding" of one metal into another, and the effect may be disappointing. When using metal clay, we need to compress and condense rather than stretch and expand, in order to achieve crisp, contrasting patterns of colors. The main tool that is used for this purpose is a clay extruder. The clay extruder, by forcing a larger mass of clay through a smaller hole, does exactly that: condense and compress.

The techniques introduced in this book are: inlay, bulls eye canes, mokume-gane, wood grain, stripes, gradient surfaces (in which one color gradually blends into the other), mixing colors (to create rose gold color, sterling silver, shibuichi, and other golden hues), and additional techniques for combining different metals. Mokume-gane literally means "wood grain metal," but wood grain is only one instance of the variety of mokume-gane designs represented in this book.

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