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Women Devise Costume Jewelry

Modern jewelry construction presents a challenge to student designers, reports Madeline Morrisson

DESIGNING and making original jewelry is the project of home economics students who create their own smart accessories in a jewelry course taught by Professor Mabel Fisher of the Department of Applied Art. The course is required of all art majors but may be elected by other students who have taken prerequisite art courses.

Metals used for the jewelry include pewter, copper and silver. Bright, hard plastics are gaining importance as settings for rings and clips. Pewter, an alloy of tin, is a soft malleable metal and is used in the first pieces constructed. Silver, which is expensive and requires more skill in handling, is used after the student has had more experience in designing. A fine finish is produced by rubbing the metal with steel wool and later polishing it with a buffer and jeweler's rouge. An oxidized finish is made by dipping the metal in a solution of sulphur and polishing the higher areas. Sterling silver is kept free from dirt and dust by dipping in a solution of dilute sulphuric acid. This is called pickling.

Rounded forms or spheres are made with a rubber hammer and a dapping tool and block. A rawhide hammer which leaves no impressions is used to flatten the metal. Square or rectangular blocks are built by soldering together tiny pieces of metal. A flame of hot gas and air is applied with quick darting movements to melt the solder. The steam disappears after it has been thoroughly rubbed with steel wool.

The possibilities for original jewelry designs are almost unlimited. Jewelry may serve both a decorative and functional purpose. A functional piece of jewelry is not too heavy or bulky and has no sharp edges exposed.

One of the most usual methods of designing jewelry is making a sketch and later making an exact model from paper or clay. Often the students find they can produce more interesting units by combining the different shapes and forms they have constructed for practice in dapping and soldering techniques. By doing this they can see more quickly and easily the possibilities of a design. Occasionally after planning a pin or ring a girl will discover that by repetition of the design she can produce a smart bracelet.

Through the jewelry course uninteresting barrettes have acquired originality and character. One student made a barrette which fit across the top of her head which was decorated with a row of two different size semi-spheres. Her creation suited her hairdress and personality. Instead of the plain silver barrette a student made some from coils of narrow metal and balls creating an open design. The students also have added other metals including copper, to the commercial hair clasps and made simple units on the plain bars.

Rings can be constructed in different ways. A piece of metal may be added to a plain band, making a fairly low ring or the rings can be built up in the form of a cube to give a solid appearance. A design in a ring can be added to the basic shape or can be achieved through construction.

Stones set in the jewelry are inexpensive, showing that cost is not a measure of beauty. Stones are not the only means of adding color to a design. Plastic rods can be cut with fine saws and polished; buttons, and more frequently, "cats eyes" which have been sent as gifts from the student's area, make attractive rings.

Recently a student made an unusual pair of rings set with small black cone-shaped stones. When they were worn together on adjacent fingers, a silver semi-circle was formed. If they are not too large, more than one stone may be set in a ring. A small rim to hold the setting is made the size of the base of the stone and soldered onto the ring. The stone is set inside the rim and held in place by bending the rim tightly against the side of the stone.

Bracelets also have few limitations. The type of bracelet which presents a challenge to the designer is a link bracelet which requires an easy clasp which will fit into the design of the bracelet. The links are rectangular built-up shapes, half spheres, or units built of coils, balls or twisted metal. The fastening may be part of the link or purely functional. Stones also may be set into bracelets.

Unusual twin pins have been made which can be worn separately or as a unit. They also may be set with stones. Conventionalized flowers, animals and leaves are designed but the creation of abstract designs requires more ingenuity and imagination. Students have made pins and rings to go with original costumes designed in textile classes. Buttons also may be designed to suit the personality of the student or her costume. Belt buckles are made to match the buttons. Some pieces of jewelry are being made to wear on the side of the belt.

The students have many opportunities to sell their original pieces and designs to friends, but most of them prefer to keep their work. If labor and materials were available, these students might be producing original designs for commercial use, for the field of well designed costume jewelry is widening.

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