

A conversation with metalsmith Cynthia Eid



Educator, author, and artist Cynthia Eid is known for her bold, adventurous forms that test the limits of metal's structure. Twisted, but never tortured, her pieces evoke the natural world as seen through a dreamscape — half-imagined versions of familiar organic forms. Eid is based in

Lexington, Massachusetts, teaches at workshops across the country, and has become known for her technical expertise in new tools and materials, including Argentium Sterling Silver.

Your family was important in your becoming an artist, because they introduced you to the idea of making things yourself.

That attitude, of being able to figure something out, came from how I grew up. We made everything ourselves, fixed everything ourselves. When I got into jewelry, my mother got me what I needed. I had a saw, a BernzOmatic, a few files...I was happy!

You are fascinated by pieces made from one piece of metal — pieces that really test the metal's limits.

The more I can do with one piece of metal without having to add

another piece, the better I like it. One of the most satisfying things about deep-drawing is turning the metal inside out. Metal is so stiff, but there are times when you can watch it flow like taffy.

After getting your degree, you spent five years doing bench work. How necessary was that kind of training?

On the one hand, I learned all sorts of things that I didn't learn at the university. I learned to think faster, design faster, and work faster. I learned a lot of technical stuff. But I also made a lot of ugly stuff in the gold-jewelry factory where I worked for 3 years, and that was *painful*. So, I took pride in making the best hinges, settings, molds, and box catches I could.

Any advice for jewelers just starting out?

Make yourself rounded. There's a lot to be said for knowing how

[a] **Sampler brooch.** Sterling silver, 14k gold. $2\frac{3}{4} \times 1\frac{1}{4} \times \frac{1}{4}$ in. (70 x 32 x 6.5mm). [b] **Torsion pendant on handwoven chain.** Sterling silver, 14k and 18k gold, amethyst, pearls. $5 \times \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2}$ in. (12.7 x 1.3 x 1.3cm). [c] **Polkadots bracelet.** Argentium sterling. 2 x 3 x 1 in. (51 x 76 x 25.5mm). [d] **Icy Waters bracelet.** Argentium sterling. $2 \times 2\frac{3}{4} \times 1\frac{1}{2}$ in. (51 x 70 x 38mm). [e] **Torsion Within pendant on handwoven chain.** Sterling silver, 14k and 22k gold, garnets. $5 \times \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2}$ in. (12.7 x 1.3 x 1.3cm). [f] **Vessel of Light: Eternal Light of Community wall sculpture.** Copper. 15 x 21 x 15 in. (38.1 x 53.3 x 38.1cm). [g] **Lines of Honeycomb earrings.** Sterling silver, sterling/18k gold bimetal. $3 \times \frac{1}{4} \times \frac{1}{4}$ in. (76 x 6.5 x 6.5mm). [h] **Pennifolds I neckpiece.** Sterling and fine silver, sterling/18k gold bimetal. $18 \times 4 \times \frac{1}{2}$ in. (45.7 x 10.2 x 1.3cm).





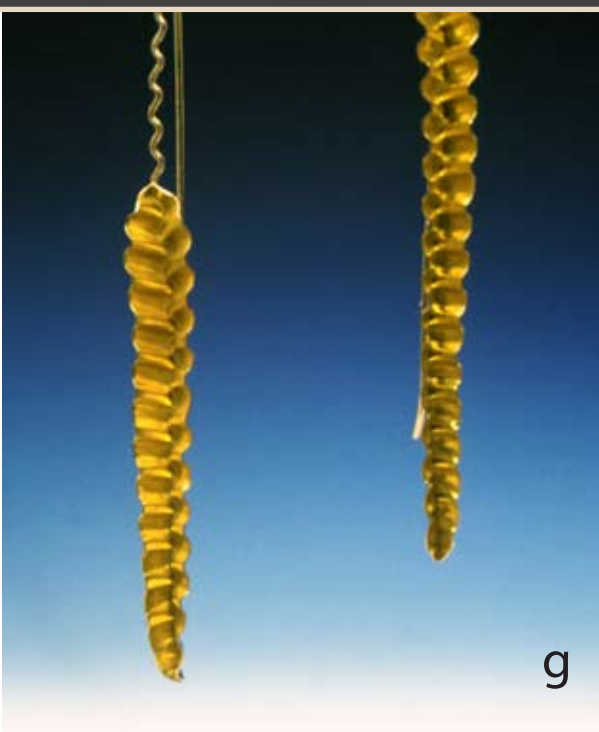
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to think and having an educational background to bring to your work. *Especially* if you're interested in being an art jeweler. You have to know art history, to have a sense of the context that you fit into. If you go to the North Bennett Street School, where there's great technique, take a class and learn design. If you go to a great university and get design training, go to Blaine Lewis and get your technique down.

To me, that's what's interesting about metalsmiths and jewelry makers; we're constantly balancing that creativity, the design, and technique. All the lines are blurred about when you're designing and when you're being technical. Ideally, it's all one in my mind.

As part of the tool development team at Bonny Doon, and with your association with the new Argentium sterling, you've become known for innovation of techniques and tools.

That's so strange for me! For so many years I felt that I was so traditional and stodgy.

So how did you get involved?

Once I get into a thing, I go all the way. I got interested because I realized my arm has only so many hammer blows in it — I couldn't hammer everything from scratch for the rest of my life. I see the hydraulic press as a tool — my biggest hammer.

It was the same thing with Argentium sterling. I heard there was a sterling silver out there that didn't have firescale. I searched until I found the sources, and I just hoarded it. And then it was on the market, and I was the expert.

I'm known for these technical things, but they're a means to an end. It's all about making the work. It just happened that I came to know about these things that were helpful to my work. But that's not my whole identity.

What connection is there between innovation in design and the tools you use?

A new tool is like a new toy. I get a new tool, and it's like, "playtime!" At the same time, I'm very Midwest-workaholic. I'm

very aware of obligations, so I'm constantly aware of what I need to do and what I ought to do and work work work! I get sent a tool because Lee Marshall and Phil Poirier [of Bonny Doon] know I will explore with it, give feedback about what's right or wrong with it, write instructions for it. I'm obligated to play with it!

Sometimes I've got one new toy on one side of the bench, another new toy on the other. The classic case of that is when I had the microfold brake on one side with the work I'd done with it, and the hydraulic press on the other with the work I'd done with that, and I thought, "What if I combined them?"

So these forms — where do they come from?

I've been trying to figure that out for years! They resemble the things that I look at and love. I look at it as seeing what the metal suggests and then helping it get where it wants to go. It's like there's a dance or a conversation. Sometimes it's like you have to find that part of your mind that isn't so verbal and consciously thinking things, and let it happen — it's kind of Zen-like.

I like it when my pieces look like something that nature *could* have made, but you can't say, "Yes, that's a shell." Or, one person says it's a shell, the next person says, "No, it's a leaf." And another person says, "No, it's a seed pod." The more different things that people say it looks like, the more successful it is, to my mind.

And that sense of play you mentioned is very clear in your work.

I do feel really fortunate that I have a job that's fun. But I also find that things go better when you're having fun. That's the cool thing — when you're tight and tense it interferes with what you're doing — your motion and your mobility as well as being able to get into that mental "zone" where the ideas flow and everything works. So the more fun you're having, the better the work is. How cool is that? **A**

[i] Golden Lining bracelet. Sterling/18k gold bimetal. 2¼ x 3 x 1¼ in. (70 x 76 x 32mm). [j] Blades of Grass bracelet. Argentium sterling. 2 x 3 x ½ in. (51 x 76 x 13mm).



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