

SECRET SHOP WEAPONS

# Give Me a Brake

This month, we asked Cynthia Eid of Arlington Heights, Massachusetts: If you were stranded on an island (that just happened to have a bench in the middle and some metal hanging around), what tool would you want to have that allows you to do things you can't do with any other tool?

**So tell us. What's your secret weapon?**

A microfold brake.

**Why do you love it so much?**

It allows me to corrugate metal, inventing new textures and patterns while adding strength to metal. With the strength created by microfolding and corrugation, I can make large, bold jewelry that is nevertheless very light.

**How do you use it in your work?**

I begin by corrugating metal sheet. Then I form it gently with hammers or a hydraulic press. Some of the forming processes make the corrugation even more interesting.

The ability to use thin metal not only makes the pieces wearable, but also more affordable from a materials standpoint, which is especially helpful considering current metals prices. Some of my new work (shown here) involves exploring the springiness of corrugated metal; other work explores combinations of texture and form.

I really enjoy the process of experimenting with ideas, materials, and tools when working in metal. My best work is usually



designed in this manner, rather than by carefully drawing and planning.

**You mentioned another tool that you couldn't live without. What's that?**

While I adore my microfold brake, my body is really my most important tool. With my brain, I can figure out how to manipulate metal. Sometimes, it does not matter how fancy the tools are that are available—problem-solving is done with that stuff between your ears.

No matter how good I am with pliers and hammers, my best tools for bending or forming metal are often my fingers. They leave no marks that need to be polished out, they are capable of very complex maneuvers, and they *feel* when the metal gets too work-hardened or fatigued. If something is too big to be bent with just my hands, I can use my thigh as a

stake to get the leverage I need for making a large, soft bend with no tool marks, and my knees can act as a vise, or add power.

Whenever I begin feeling tool-crazed, I look at the intricate box and bracelet that I purchased from a man sitting cross-legged in the dirt in Senegal. He used a pipe as a torch, concentrating the heat of the fire that burned in front of him. He had very few tools, which he likely made himself, yet he crafted exquisitely detailed silver and ebony jewelry and small-ware. I am humbled whenever I remember squatting in the dirt under a tarp and holding the objects that this talented guy made. ♦

