



Set the stone

A pronged setting allows any gemstone to be set in metal clay

by Irina Miech

Think designing with gemstones is reserved for seasoned jewelry makers? Even beginning metal clay artists can use the sparkling allure of gemstones in their work with this simple yet versatile technique. If this is your first metal clay project, try it once using a stamped texture alone for ornamentation, then add the pronged setting to subsequent pieces. There are endless variations for using gemstones in your metal clay jewelry. Learn this technique once, and you'll use it for a lifetime.



▲ Many natural gemstones would be harmed if fired in a kiln. To use a gemstone, simply attach a pronged setting, then set the gemstone after firing.



◀ The imprint of a Celtic design adds medieval flair to this easy pendant.



[1] Roll out the clay. Lightly apply olive oil to a heavy plastic surface, rubber stamp, craft knife or tissue blade, acrylic roller, and cocktail straw. Place the clay on your work surface between two stacks of 4 playing cards. Slowly roll over the clay with the acrylic roller, making the clay slightly larger than the stamp.

[2] Make the impression. Add 6 or more playing cards to each stack, depending on the thickness of your rubber stamp. (An unmounted stamp works best for this.) Lightly press the stamp into the clay, keeping a small border around the edge. Beginning in the middle of the stamp, roll once away from you and once toward you with the acrylic roller.

[3] Embed the pronged setting. Hold the pronged setting with tweezers, and gently place it in the desired position on the piece. Press down until you feel the resistance of the work surface.



[4] Shape the piece. Use a craft knife or tissue blade to cut a bail tab at the top of the piece approximately $\frac{1}{8}$ – $\frac{5}{32}$ in. (3–4mm) wide and $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (13mm) long. Cut off the excess clay from the bottom of the pendant as well. The shape does not need to be perfect; you will refine the piece in a later step.

[5] Form the bail. Test-roll the bail tab around the cocktail straw to ensure that you have enough length; trim or adjust it as needed. Roll the tab over the straw until it touches

the front of the pendant. Use metal clay syringe or slip to attach the end of the bail to the front of the pendant. Press down gently with the end of a paintbrush to secure the join. Remove the straw gently.

Refine the shape. Let the piece dry to the leather-hard state. File the edges of the pendant and bail with jeweler's files to create a smooth shape. To fill any cracks or imperfections, paint the area with a thin layer of slip, and refile when it's dry. If desired, sand the edges and



back of the pendant with 400- to 600-grit sandpaper.

Fire the pendant. Fire the pendant in a kiln, using a hot pot, or using a torch according to the metal clay manufacturer's instructions.

[6] Finish the pendant. After it has cooled, burnish the piece with



a stainless steel brush or use a brass brush with soap and water. For a high shine, tumble the piece with steel shot and burnishing compound for at least half an hour. Apply a liver of sulfur patina if desired. (See "Tips: Show Off Your Texture with Liver of Sulfur," *below left*.) Gently place the gemstone into the pronged setting, and secure it with prong-setting pliers. (Fine-silver prong settings do not need to be cut, because the metal is malleable.) Attach a chain, and your pendant is ready to wear! 📌

Irina Miech is the owner of Eclectica Beads in Wisconsin (eclecticabeads.com). She is also the author of the upcoming book, *Metal Clay for Beaders* (Kalmbach Publishing Co., 2006).

tips

show off your texture with liver of sulfur

Liver of sulfur imitates the natural tarnish that appears on silver over time. Here are some tips for beginners:

- Purchase the lump version of this chemical, and mix it according to the manufacturer's instructions; or, buy the premade version.
- Store extra solution in a dark area.
- Work in a well-ventilated room.
- Warm either the solution or your pendant before immersion.
- After the piece has achieved the desired color, remove it from the solution immediately.
- Clean the pendant with dishwashing liquid and water.
- Rub the raised areas of the pendant with a jeweler's cloth to remove some of the patina.

For more information on liver of sulfur, see "Patina," January 2005, page 48.

materials

- Metal clay, 6g
- Fine-silver pronged setting
- Metal clay syringe or slip
- Gemstone to fit pronged setting
- Chain of your choice

tools & supplies

- Olive oil
- Heavy plastic surface
- Rubber stamp, unmounted
- Craft knife or tissue blade
- Cocktail straw
- Playing cards
- Acrylic roller
- Tweezers
- Small paintbrush
- Jeweler's files
- Sandpaper, 400–600 grit (optional)
- Kiln and kiln shelf, hot pot, or torch
- Stainless steel or brass brush
- Tumbler with steel shot and burnishing compound (optional)
- Liver of sulfur (optional)
- Jeweler's cloth (optional)
- Prong-setting pliers

resources

- PMC3 clay, PMC3 syringe or slip (various suppliers, pmcguild.com)
- Fine-silver pronged setting (Eclectica: 262.641.0910, eclecticabeads.com)

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