

Serpentine Splendor

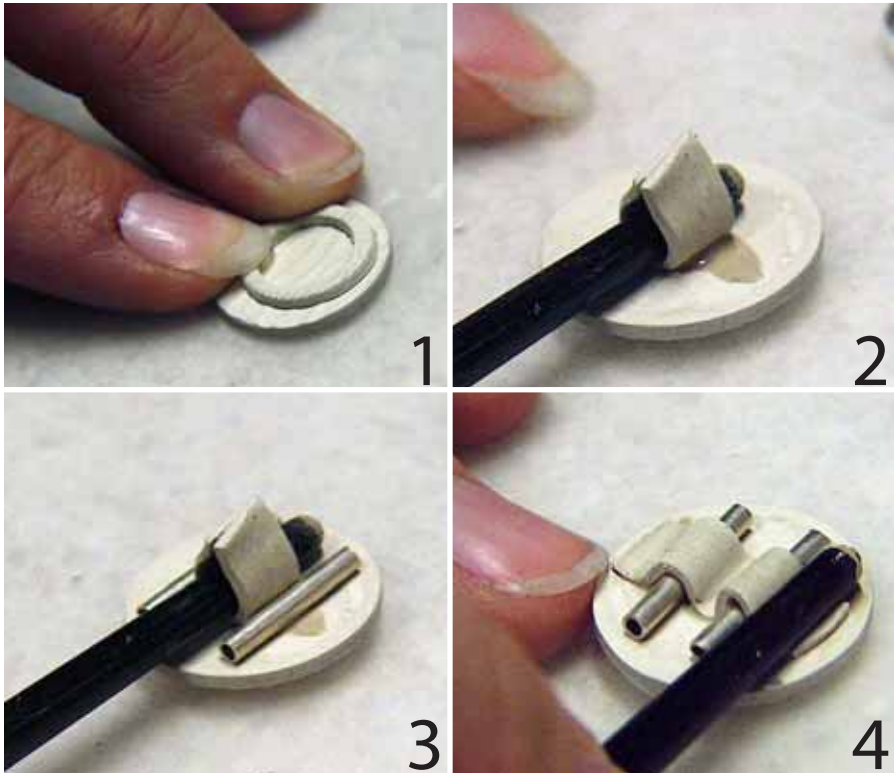
*An innovative connection
technique brings form and flexibility to this metal-clay bracelet*

by Gretchen Amberg

Flexibility is a comfortable quality to give nearly any piece of jewelry. Unfortunately, flexibility can also invite jewelry to slump and appear stretched out of shape. Not so with this beautiful piece! The aventurine-adorned elements in this metal-clay bracelet are connected by ordinary wire cables; however, the secret to achieving formed flexibility is the addition of sterling coil. This slinky, springlike material is hollow and, when slipped over the wire cables, brings flexibility, comfort, and attractiveness to the piece. Straight tubing and metal clay act in concert to form tracks on the back of each metal-clay element, allowing the cables to slide through and join the elements with ease.



**Purchase sterling coil in custom ▲
lengths from most large jewelry-
making supply companies.**



materials

- Metal clay: 2 or 3 16g packages, depending on size of elements
- Metal-clay slip
- 7 fine-silver bezels, sizes of your choice
- 7 stone cabochons, sized to fit bezels
- Sterling-silver tubing: .9mm diameter or less, about 10 in. (25.4cm)
- Crimp beads
- Double-strand clasp
- Wire cable: thin, about 20 in. (50.8cm)
- Sterling coil: hollow, .9mm diameter, 4½ in. (11.4cm)

tools & supplies

- Acrylic roller
- Playing cards
- Teflon
- Texture plates, or other flat, textured items
- Circle cutters, 2 sizes of your choice
- Paintbrush
- Sanding materials (sandpaper, sanding sponges, emery boards, etc.)
- Jeweler's saw and blades
- Kiln and kiln shelf
- Stainless-steel brush
- Tumbler with steel shot and burnishing compound
- Bezel pusher
- Curved burnisher
- Pliers: crimping or flatnose

resources

- PMC3 metal clay
- Kemper and Ateco circle cutters, polymerclayexpress.com
- Aventurine cabochons, sterling-silver tubing, sterling coil: Rio Grande, 800.545.6566, riogrande.com

Make a base shape. Roll a slab of metal clay 4–5 playing cards thick on your chosen texture. Punch out a circle using a circle cutter of your desired size. Optionally, choose any shape. Set the base shape aside to dry.

Make a bezel ring. Roll another slab of clay 3 cards thick on either the same or a complementary texture. Cut it into a smaller version of your base shape.

Choose a circle cutter that is slightly larger than the outer diameter of the fine-silver bezel. Punch a hole in the middle of the smaller shape to create a ring. Test fit the bezel, making sure there is a small space between the bezel and the bezel ring. The clay will shrink up to the bezel during firing and form a tight grip. Set the bezel ring aside to dry to the bone-dry state. Sand it as necessary.

[1] Adhere the bezel ring to the base. Use a heavy layer of metal-clay slip to “glue” the bezel ring to the base shape. Paint a layer of water on the seam around the outside of the bezel ring to form a solid bond between the pieces. Set this piece aside until it reaches the bone-dry state. Sand it as necessary.

Size and cut the tubing. Cut two small lengths of sterling-silver tubing to fit on the back of the element. Make sure to cut them short enough that the tubing will not extend over the edges of the element when the

element shrinks during firing.

[2–4] Attach the tubing. Roll a slab of clay 1 or 2 cards thick. For an added touch, texture the slab. Cut a narrow strip from the slab, about ¼ x ½ in. (6.5 x 13mm), depending on the size of your element.

Paint a layer of slip on the back side of the element. Fold the narrow strip in half around the thin handle of a paintbrush. Use the paintbrush to press the center of the strip onto the back center of the element [2]. Hold the two loose ends of the strip up, and put the two tubing pieces in place — one on each side of the center [3]. Arrange them so they are parallel and centered, and space them so they will line up with the double-strand clasp.

Lay the loose edges of the strip over the tubing, and press them down onto the back of the element with the paintbrush handle [4]. Make sure the strip hugs the tubing closely. Brush water over the seams for better adhesion. Let the element dry to the bone-dry state.

[5] Place the bezel and fire. Flip the piece over and apply a thick dab of slip to the inside of the bezel ring. Place the bezel in the ring. Let it dry to bone dry, then fire the element according to the metal-clay manufacturer's instructions. Let it cool.

up!
pucker

In the step “Make a Bezel Ring” you’re advised to leave a small space between the fine-silver bezel and the metal-clay bezel ring. When the clay is fired, it will shrink up to the bezel snugly, creating a flat appearance. If you prefer puckers and pleats, make the hole in the bezel ring snug to the bezel. When you fire the piece, the clay will usually slightly bow or pucker as it shrinks. This doesn’t affect the strength of the piece at all, and it can create quite a nice visual effect.



5



6

Process photos by Gretchen Amberg



7

pattern

play

When cutting out the base shape, consider the orientation of the textured pattern. Keep in mind that you'll be linking about seven elements to form the bracelet, and you can alternate the direction of the pattern from one element to the next. Pay especially close attention to the orientation of the textured pattern when adhering the tubing to the backs of the elements. The tubing placement will determine how the bracelet will look once all of the elements are strung together. For example, if your pattern is lined, you could orient the elements so they alternate from vertical lines to horizontal lines.

You can also play with the placement of the bezel-set cabochon. Think about this while adhering the bezel ring to the base shape in step 1. Place the bezel ring in the center of each element, alternate it from the top to the bottom, or create a curved line as you progress from element to element.

Polish the element. Brush the element with a stainless-steel brush to remove the white coloration from firing. Place the element in a tumbler for about 30 minutes, or until a high shine is achieved. The sterling-silver tubing will have oxidized during firing, and tumbling will remove this discoloration.


[6] Set the cabochon.

Place the cab into the bezel, and use a bezel pusher to "rock" the bezel sides up to the cab. Use a clock face as your guide to work opposite sides of the bezel so the cab remains centered. The following order works well: 12, 6, 3, 9, 7, 1, 4, 10, 2, 8, 11, 5. Go around the entire circumference of the bezel with a curved burnisher to smooth the bezel walls to the cab.

Make six more of these elements for a 7-in. (17.8cm) bracelet.

Since you have practiced making one, making the other six will be a breeze.

[7] Assemble the bracelet. When all the elements are completed, attach two 10-in. (25.4cm) strands of thin wire cable to one half of a double-strand clasp. Do this by stringing a crimp bead onto each wire strand, looping each wire strand around its respective clasp loop, sliding the tail of each wire strand through its respective crimp bead, and flattening the crimp beads with crimping pliers or flatnose pliers.

Once the wires are attached, align the sterling-silver tubing of one element with the wires, and slide the wires through the tubing. Slide a $\frac{3}{8}$ -in. (9.5mm) piece of hollow sterling coil onto each wire to cover the bare wire between elements. Slide the next element onto the wires. Continue this pattern until you've finished. Lastly, secure the wires to the second clasp piece with crimp beads to finish the bracelet. 

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