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AT THE BENCH

Waste Not

Saving money on common repairs

BY SUSAN EISEN As a beginning metalsmith in the art metals department at the University of Texas at El Paso, I completed my assignments in brass and copper—even silver was too precious for me to practice with. I remember the first time I used gold to make a piece: I was shaking while holding the torch just thinking about the value. Every penny mattered—and that was in 1980 when gold was \$60 an ounce.

Fast-forward to present day, when \$1,100 is the new norm. Never before has the notion of careful gold consumption been more important to me and my business. When gold was at \$300 an ounce, I wasn't paying that much attention to my jewelers' procedures, as long as they met my quality control standards. But as gold climbed, I made it a point to become more aware of what was being used in the shop, and I found many ways to be less wasteful and save money in common repair operations, such as the two described here.

RING SIZING. There are certain materials now available for performing repairs that may cost more initially but can save



you money in the long term. One such item is Stuller's trademarked Preform sizing stock. This gold sizing stock comes pre-formed to fit the job. By using the company's drilling tool to make a half round shape in the shank and then fitting the Preform into the space, you lose very little gold and reduce the time required to finish the sizing to several minutes. Compare this to the traditional method of melting gold, rolling it to the correct thickness, bending, filing, fitting, and finishing, which takes about 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the jeweler's skill level. With the Preform, all you do is cut it to the width of the ring, solder it, and finish. An experienced jeweler can accomplish this task in as little as three minutes; it may take about seven to 10 minutes for a jeweler who is less skilled.

In regard to saving gold, my data shows that each step using a traditional approach can result in a one to three percent loss of gold, maybe more. The grinding, filing, and cutting operations traditionally produce the most waste in gold dust. Using the Preform system has cut my waste for this operation by 50 to 75 percent.

SOLDER. Cutting sheet solder usually results in three-quarters of it landing where you want it and the rest flying into the deep crevices of the shop, never to be found again. This is an area where pre-cut product can result in less precious metal waste. When I switched from buying pennyweights of sheet solder to pennyweight bottles of pre-cut solder, I started to closely track how much solder is needed for each task. For example, I might need 20 pieces for a complex assembly project, but just two pieces to repair a prong. I now have a much clearer idea of how much solder is needed for each job, and my 1-pennyweight bottles of cut solder are lasting two to three times longer than a pennyweight of sheet solder did in the past. Very little flies across the room and each piece is cut evenly so there is a consistent amount for each solder seam. Although they take more time to monitor and cost a little more, these products' benefits far outweigh the costs. ♦

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