

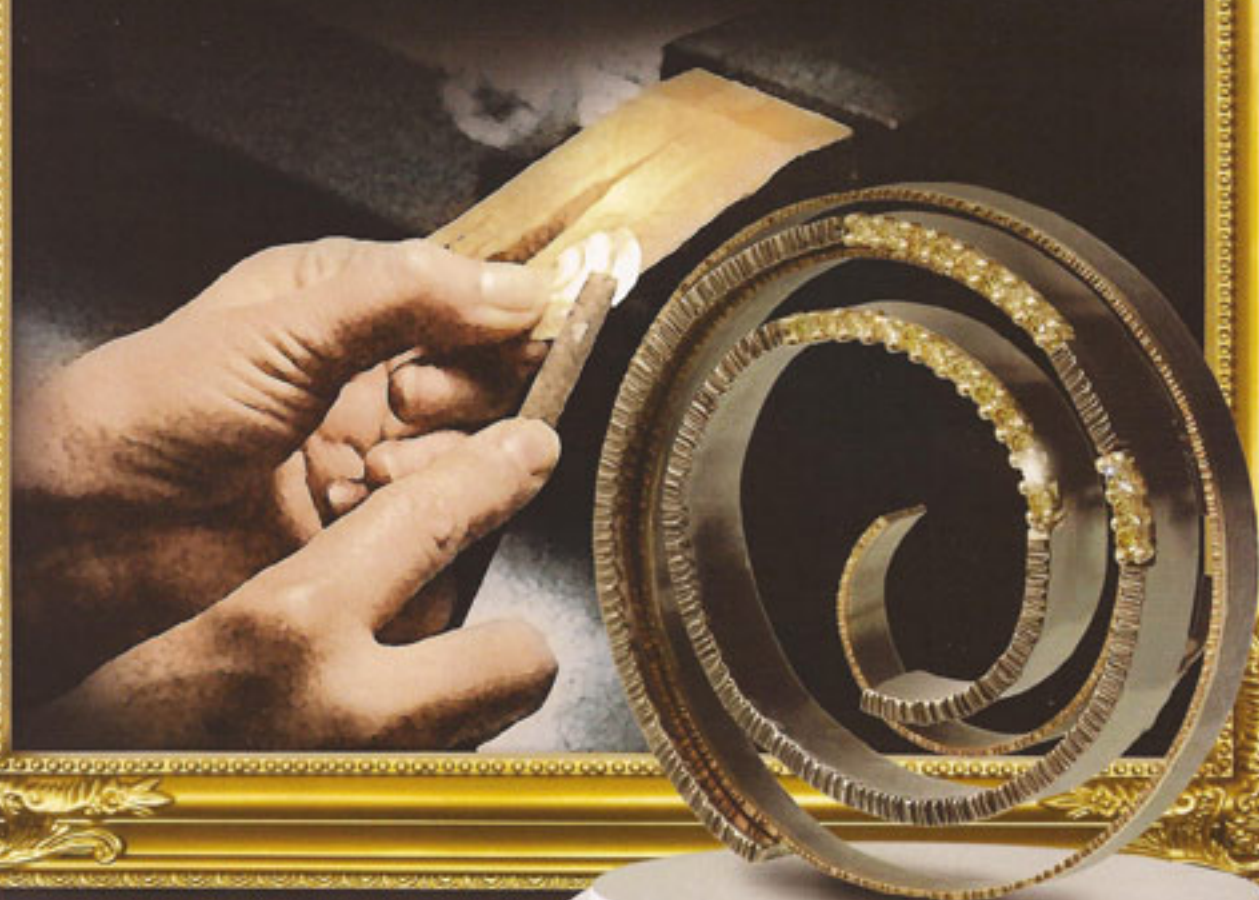
PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE IN JEWELRY MAKING & DESIGN

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Old Gold, NEW TREASURE

Tips for re-using and recycling your customers' metal when repurposing

When a customer walks into your studio or store with the contents of her jewelry box in a Ziploc, you know she's either there for cash or a new treasure. If it's the latter, and she asks you to turn the outdated gold chains and rings into a fabulous new piece, you've got options: You can either give her credit for the metal against a new purchase, or re-use the metal in a new design. Here are some factors to consider that can influence the path you take:

Give credit for old metal.

Start by separating pieces by metal type and, in the case of gold, karat quality. Weigh each batch separately. When working with gold, to determine the fine gold content of each batch multiply the weight by the decimal equivalent of the karat. Normally, that would mean that if you have 10 grams of 14k, you'd multiply $10 \times 0.583 = 5.83$ grams. But considering that before 1981 enforcers of the National Gold and Silver Stamping Act required stamped jewelry to be accurate to only within 1 karat (for fabricated product) or a half karat (for cast product), 14k was

often only 13-13.5 karat. To be on the safe side, Gary Dawson of Gary Dawson Designs in Eugene, Oregon, uses a multiplier of 0.545 or 0.565, respectively, when crediting for 14k. Determine how you will credit the client based on the current gold market and your refining costs.

Re-use old metal directly.

This is most often the case when a client has sentimental ties to the old jewelry and wants the same metal incorporated into the new design. When recycling old metal, consider all possible quality issues. Susan Eisen of Susan Eisen Fine Jewelry and Watches in El Paso, Texas, warns her customers that the quality of the metal in the finished product might be compromised—it could be pitted or have strange colors. She makes sure they understand that she cannot accept responsibility for the quality of the casting. "Most of the time, they don't care," she says. "It's super important to them to have a piece of their mother's ring in their ring. They believe [the color patches or pitting] give the piece character as opposed to being a negative."

If the client insists on re-using the old metal, begin by cleaning the metal of any solder. Clip off heads, cut out solder joints and sizings, and avoid re-using chains, two-tone bands, and wedding sets that have been soldered together. Combine the same alloys by karat



quality and color if the customer insists on having the new piece quality stamped. To avoid mixing white gold and yellow gold,

When melting, use a soft flame to melt off any bits of solder you might have missed and to ensure everything is clean and mixed thoroughly. And be sure to introduce at least 25 percent new metal into the mix.

Send out the old jewelry for small-batch refining.

If a customer insists on perfection in the new piece and they want quality stamped hallmarks, but they still want to reuse grandma's gold, check out small-batch refining. Some refiners will take your customer's gold, track it separately through the refining process, and return the fine gold content from that jewelry to you for alloying and re-use in the customer's new piece. The gold comes out of the customer's jewelry, but it is pristine with no problems to sidestep. (There are extra charges for this that will have to be passed on to the client. Check with your refiner for batch minimums and fees.) But because you are using new gold, quality issues will be minimized, and you can stamp and hallmark the finished piece. ♦

This article was adapted from "Repurposing Done Right," which appeared in a prior MJSA Custom Jeweler. Read the full article in the Digital Edition, available at MJSA.org.

