

5 JEWELRY MAKERS Talk Tools



Think of a tool that you can't live without. Odds are, it falls into one of three categories. It could be an "investment tool": A beauty that you saved up to be able to afford, and which justifies its high cost by the fact that you use it every day. Or, it could be something surprisingly inexpensive that has become one of your stand-bys, and is all the more beloved because it cost you next to nothing. Or, it could just be strange. Something that was never intended to be a jewelry-making tool. In those cases, you have a soft spot for it because you saw its potential and gave it new life and new purpose.



We asked five prominent jewelry makers to name their must-have tools, one in each of those categories.

1| What's a **high-priced (investment) tool** that's worth every penny?

2| What's the **best economy tool** you've found? (The cheaper the better!)

3| What's the **strangest thing** you've ever used as a **tool**?



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Loretta Lam

1 | “The most important and most expensive equipment in my studio is my Sears Convection oven. It gives me total peace of mind. I know that my work will be properly cured and therefore strong and durable. Polymer has a small window for curing — too low a temperature and the finished piece is brittle, too high and it’s burned! A convection oven keeps a constant temperature, none of the spiking that you get with traditional ovens. And with the addition of digital temperature settings and a programmable timer, I can literally load up the oven and walk away with no worries.”

2 | “The best tool I have is my hands. Over time my hands have gotten smarter and more proficient with the clay. There is no substitute for sculpting or forming three-dimensional bead shapes. No bead roller or sculpting tool can finesse the clay exactly as I want it. Of course your polymer studio would be nowhere without the pasta machine and some really sharp blades, but equally important is a really good sense of touch.”

3 | “One day while I was walking in my woods, a little shiny bit of something caught my eye. It was a piece of glass, a textured shelf from a very old refrigerator, the kind I remembered having as a kid. About ¼ in. (6.5 mm) thick with a deep abstract design on one side. It’s become my favorite texture tool. And one that cannot be easily duplicated or replaced!”





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Shana Kroiz

1| "The Foredom K1090 is the micromotor with the quick-release handpiece and the hammer handpiece. Plus, I added the high-torque handpiece. This system gives me two flex shafts and a hammer handpiece with one foot



pedal. I use this tool every day for everything from drilling, polishing, texturing, and stone setting to grinding and filling. I love this tool and it was the most I have spent on a studio tool. I think I spent over \$1,000 for the whole set up!"

2| "I use a set of cheap needle files I found in a hardware store for \$4.00. It's the kind of set you would never use on precious metal, but they are perfect for wax carving. I love these cheap files more than any wax files on the market."



3| "I use broken saw blades instead of paintbrushes for fine work, such as applying 'stop flow' to my tubing when soldering hinges. I also use them to apply flux to small areas. I also use them as drill bits; I learned this from John Cogswell, and I love this trick!"



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Jim Dailing

1| "A GRS Benchmate system. There are many other tools that are more expensive, but I bought mine nearly 14 years ago on the recommendation of a trusted friend. [He] told me that I'd never regret spending the money and I never have. I use it every day in my studio ... and on many processes.

The Benchmate makes my work better (more precise or consistent) and it's been a pleasure to use from the first day that I had it in my studio."



2| "A cheap pair of scissors that I use on all of my solder that I use on all of my solder cost me only \$1.99."

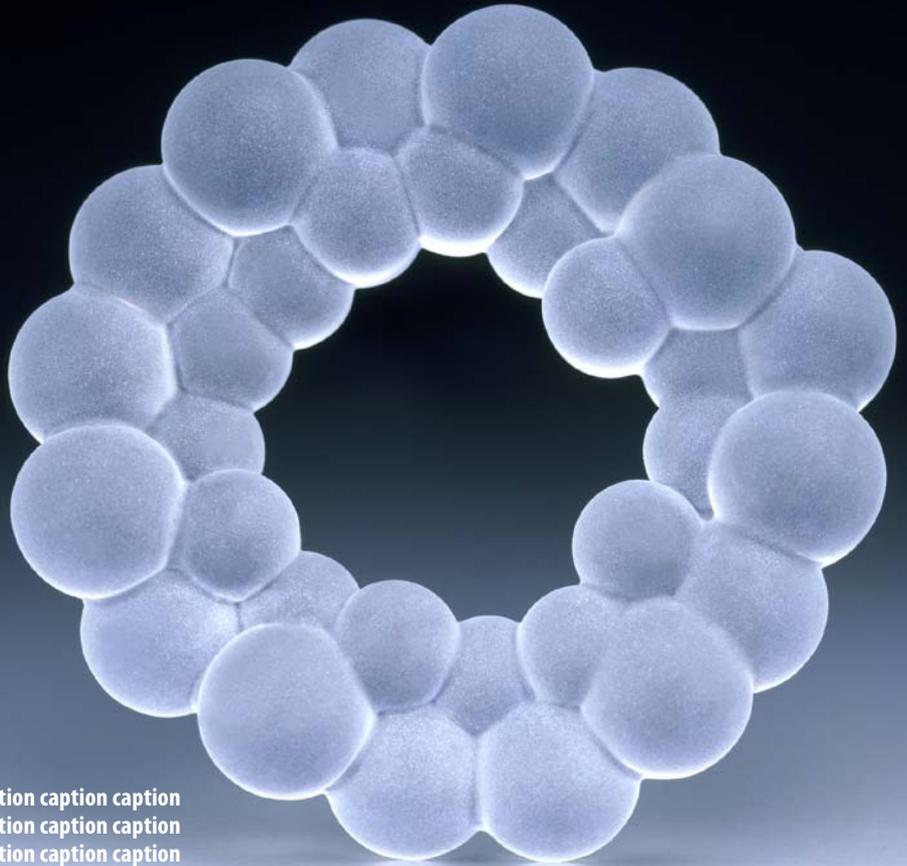
3| "I have a scrap piece of bamboo that measures about 3/8 in. (9.5 mm) in diameter and about 3 in. (76 mm) long. Not only is it a beautiful thing to look at, but I use it as a burnisher when working with 22 and 24k gold, as it leaves a soft sheen without marring the soft metal."





Donald Friedlich

1 "My Diamond Pacific Genie is a great system for lapidary, glass working, and more. The six permanent wheels make moving from rough to polish quick and easy."



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2 "The Triple Ripple Diamond Drills by Crystalite are a fantastic product. They cut much faster than traditional drills and last longer. I drill a lot of small blind holes in glass for findings. Since my glass is submerged in water [when I drill it], it's a challenge to know how deep I'm drilling. I don't want to drill through the front of the piece! I found a great solution thanks to my root-canal dentist. By putting a small piece of rubber tubing on the drill, I added a handy depth gauge. Every time the drill comes up out of the water, I can see exactly how far I've gone."



3 "I've used a lot of odd materials over the years, such as toothbrush handles as burnishers to set bezels around glass. My wife is right when she says, 'Nothing is safe around the house.' My best is my Ikea soldering cabinet. I bought an 'appliance garage' with an aluminum roll-front opening system, like a roll-top desk. This was intended to keep your toaster oven and other small appliances out of sight on your kitchen counter. I mounted some electric puck lights to the inside of the cabinet and then cut a hole in the back and attached my ventilation system (Quatro Collect-All). I then cut another larger hole in the bench top and sank my pickle pot in the hole so the top of the pot was more or less flush with the table surface. The vent system is variable speed, so if the pickle is hot and fuming a bit, I can just leave the front of the cabinet cracked and set my vent system on a low (and more importantly, *quiet*) speed. When I solder, I can turn it up a bit. This system has been a fantastic solution."





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3 | “The strangest tool I’ve used is a microbrush applicator used for polishing and cleaning teeth. It was introduced to me by my student Barbara Wieser, who is a dental assistant. You can get them on Amazon.com for about \$5.00 for a box of 100. Since I work on tiny metal clay sculptural jewelry, I find these indispensable for getting into tiny areas for greenware cleaning and finessing the metal clay. The tip is flocked so leaves no link behind and it bends to get in just about anywhere. They come in large, medium, and small. It’s also great for polishing tiny areas by putting polishing compound on the tip.” 

Holly Gage

1 | “The best tool and most expensive is my flex shaft. What *doesn’t* it do? With so many interchangeable tools, it is very versatile. I use it most for shaping and polishing with the 3M Advantage wheels and radial disks. It really puts a professional finish on all of my pieces.”

2 | “The cheapest tool I use is one I make, which is a rubber shaper/dapping tool. It is made with a flexible polymer clay. I can make one for maybe 15 cents. It’s great for smoothing clay and dapping it into deep molds for super detail. I make them in several sizes to fit almost every job. They’re also handy for propping clay when making an irregular dimensional item.”



contact the artists

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