

Wire Filigree Jewelry

Ancient techniques used for delicate designs

Once upon a time, making filigree jewelry was a skill required of all bench jewelers! In many parts of the world it is still a common practice, but in the United States it has become less common because it is so labor intensive. The art of making filigree jewelry consists of curling, twisting and plaiting fine pliable threads of metal, and uniting them at their points of contact with each other. Traditionally, filigree jewelry is fabricated in fine silver, but it can be wrought in other jewelry metals.

Filigree jewelry is made up of separate components of filigree joined together. Each component consists of an outer frame made from heavier wire, and several insets of finer wire which has been shaped to fill the space. All of the wire is commonly flat to allow pieces to nestle easily together. The outer frame sets the overall design of the piece. In a typical example, we recently fabricated an angel brooch which used platinum filigree for the wings. We started by shaping a heavier platinum wire into the outline of the wings, and then filled the resulting interior space with coils of finer twisted wire.

Those filler coils are made in a variety of repeated shapes using pliers, fingers and rolling mill. Common shapes include round and oval spirals, double reverse spirals, comma shapes

Emerald and Platinum Filigree Earrings \$2500

Green Sapphire and 18KT Filigree \$2400

Labradorite in Silver and 18KT Filigree \$1800

Nephrite Jade in Silver Filigree \$500

and angular shapes. These shapes are most commonly made from thin, flat wire, or from wire that has been twisted and then flattened in a rolling mill. When filling the frame, it is important that the inset coils are all tightly packed in so

there are good points of contact allowing the unit to be properly soldered together.

Once the component has been properly soldered, the entire component might need to be flattened with a steel block and hammer. Or it might be shaped with a doming block or other form giving it more dimensionality. Finally, the different components are joined together to make a complete piece of jewelry. Depending on the style of jewelry, the components may be soldered directly together, or they may be joined together with hinges.

Since traditional filigree jewelry is so labor-intensive, other techniques are commonly used today to create a similar look. The most common of these is to cast a wax model that looks like filigree into metal. The wax model is created either by drawing a CAD design and milling the wax, or by making a mold from a fabricated filigree ring. Both of these techniques can create very realistic copies, but on close inspection, they both lack the fine detail of fabricated filigree jewelry. Since they are cast as one piece they are typically easier to repair because they can be heated without fear of flowing previous solder joints.

Another method of creating the filigree look is machine stamping. In this case, the design and shape are cut into a metal mold. That mold is then used to literally punch and stamp the design out of sheet metal. Machine stamping is typically used to mass produce costume jewelry out of non-precious metals like nickel and brass.

Next time you're in the store, check out some of the wire filigree jewelry. You can appreciate how detailed the work is and how much time is involved in the creation of each piece!



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the single strand price
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No experience necessary.

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We can help with that!

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easier, and you won't get another useless trivet!

