



Backs, Bails and Beyond

Give your work the finish it deserves

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Have you ever noticed how often one of the first things people do when they pick up a piece of jewellery is to turn it over and look at the back? Why do they do that? What are they looking for? I can't tell you why, but I can tell you that if they find something lovely, their eyes light up and they are immediately engaged with the piece. If you put as much effort into the reverse of the piece as you do into the front then you are certain to get some lovely reactions.

Decorating the back of your piece should not be an after-thought. Make it a feature from the start and part of your design. Here are some of the methods I use.

Add a texture to both sides of the metal clay at the same time. Roll the clay out to 1.5 mm (6 cards) thick, then lay it on top of a lightly oiled texture sheet. Place 1 mm spacers (4 cards) on each side of the clay and add another oiled texture sheet, face down, on top of the clay and spacers. Make sure that both the clay and the spacers are in between the two texture sheets, like the filling in a sandwich, or your clay may end up too thin. Use your roller to roll across the top of the sandwich in one smooth, firm action and voila – clay textured on both sides ready to be cut and shaped however you like [1].

You can use a small brass brush to add a texture onto a dry clay surface. Going round and round in circles with the bristles gives a nice soft effect; drawing the brush across in straight lines gives a wood-grain effect [2]. If you dampen the surface lightly with a moist baby wipe before using the brush, you will get deeper lines and a more pronounced effect.

You can also use paste to add a texture onto the back, stippling it with a paintbrush as it dries or using a cocktail stick in the wet paste to create swirling designs [3].

A nice bail can be a real feature. The simplest method of hanging a piece is just to cut a hole in the clay and then add a jump ring, but why not make the bail part of the decoration?

The type of bail I use most often in my work is a question mark shape. Roll out clay to 1 mm (4 cards) thick and cut out a narrow ribbon. Wrap the clay around an oiled straw to make a question mark or U shape and let it dry on the straw. Refine the bail and then attach it using syringe to ensure a really strong join. Make the bail plain for contrast with the back or give it a complementary texture [4].

Bend a larger textured strip or shape of clay over a straw and attach to the top of your dried piece [5]. This type of bail is very

useful if you want to make your piece reversible, and people love having two pendants for the price of one!

Fine silver wire bent into a U shape can be attached to create a bail [6]. Roll out, texture, and cut a small shape of clay that will cover the two prongs of the U shape, remembering to allow for shrinkage. Dry and refine this shape. Extrude some syringe onto the back of the dried piece and set the ends of the U into it, add a little more syringe, and press your dry shape onto it. Use a water brush pen to clean up any excess syringe from around the edges.

To add more interest, include some decorative elements. I like to add small stones (up to 3 mm) by syringe-setting them near the bail or in a position where they will be protected from heavy wear. Extrude some syringe so it looks like a small peak of soft ice cream, and carefully place your stone onto the very top of it with the point (culet) downwards. Using the tips of a pair of tweezers gently press the stone into the syringe clay, making sure the stone stays level and centred as it goes down. The clay will come up evenly around the edges (girdle) of the stone to create a bezel. The flat top (table) of the stone should be level with or slightly below the clay bezel. To set a group of stones this way, let each one dry before adding the next one [7].

Use small balls of clay or syringed dots to create interest in open areas. Small textured or plain shapes and snakes of clay can be added to form patterns [8,9].

Finally, don't forget to sign all your work. Create your own logo and get it made into a stamp, or add your signature by hand. It is your masterpiece, make sure the world knows!

These are just a few of the many things you can do to decorate your pieces, and I hope these ideas get you thinking. And don't forget that a lot of items you make have some surface than can be decorated, like the backs of these tiny charms [10]. Rings are lovely if you add a texture to the band, and the reverse of large elements on the front of them also can be embellished [11]. The only limit is your imagination. **MC AM**



JOY FUNNELL is passionate about using colours and textures in her work. She combines traditional enamel with silver to create vibrant, unique pieces, and delights in the privilege of being able to impart knowledge to others. To see a rainbow will bring a smile to her face no matter what. She strives to be – Joy by name and Joyful by nature.

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