
BEHIND THE SCENES WITH

DEB DONAGHUE



Q: Your first workshop during Jewelry Boot Camp is the Byzantine Chain Maille bracelet. It looks fabulous! What is it about that particular “stitch” that you admire?

A: The Byzantine weave, also known as the Birdcage is, I think, one of the most beautiful weaves, as well as one of the easiest to learn. It can be adapted to many sizes making it suitable for those who like delicate jewelry or for those who like chunky jewelry - male or female.

Q: What makes this a good class for beginners?

A: Once someone starts, the pattern easily falls into place allowing them to learn basic foundational skills and produce a lovely piece in a relatively short amount of time.

Q: How did you become acquainted with chain maille?

A: My daughter! In my early 20’s I took two evening classes in silversmithing. I really enjoyed it, but then life took over and as we all know, things get complicated. About 15 years ago my daughter took a class in chain maille. I started playing around with her jump rings and I was totally, irrevocably hooked once again on metalsmithing.

Q: Do you make your own jump rings?

A: Yes, I do make my own jump rings. I use a Dremel-like tool and a jig that I purchased from Kevin Potter at www.potterusa.com called the Koil Cutter. I will bring it with me to class. There are several similar products on the market. Some more expensive and I’m sure some less. However, many people make rings using just a wooden dowel and a jewelers saw. I can demo how to do that as well. Most jewelry supply companies also sell jump rings. It’s not easy to make jewelry without using jump rings now and again.

“Once someone starts, the pattern easily falls into place-”

-DEB DONAGHUE

Q: I see you are also leading a full day session on making wire bangles. Is there more than one style you'll be teaching?

A: The photo in the catalog shows three different styles, but I will have several other examples using similar techniques for students to explore. Again, we will be looking at basic foundational skills to produce really attractive wearable jewelry - skills like sizing, creating texture, making clasps, manipulating wire, adding embellishments etc. - things students can do in their own home work spaces without a lot of equipment.

Q: Why do you use copper?

A: There are so many reasons! First, it is soft, so it is easy to work with. Second, whatever skills you learn using copper can be easily translated into other materials like brass, bronze, silver or gold. Third, it is pretty and takes patina like you wouldn't believe. And finally, it is reasonably inexpensive so no one has to be afraid to experiment or to make "mistakes".

Q: Are you still learning new jewelry techniques? What are you most excited about these days?

A: I love learning about metalsmithing. I look, I read, I take workshops, I am part of a group of metalsmiths who provide companionship, encouragement and inspiration and most importantly, I make things all the time. As we talk I am learning new techniques for back setting stones, for working with different styles of caging and about working with steel. Particularly fusing various types of metal to steel. And, of course, I always go back to my love of etching. I'm teaching a class in November on etching steel. Stay tuned!

Q: Tell me a little bit about your history with Shake Rag Alley Center for the Arts.

A: For over 20 years my husband Jeff and I lived in Mineral Point. We owned and operated a brewpub and restaurant called Brewery Creek, now Commerce Street Brewery. We welcomed the Woodlanders to our restaurant and inn as they started to come to Shake Rag years ago. Early on we brain stormed on what Shake Rag could be and not long after I began teaching. In fact one of my first classes was teaching the Byzantine weave! After we retired, and moved to Madison, I joined the Shake Rag Board and am now the treasurer.

Q: I own (and love) a pair of simple chain maille earrings that you created - copper with some square pearly beads. I bought them many years ago at a trunk show at Carla Lind's place. Where can people purchase your jewelry currently?

A: I sell at Shake Rag when we have jewelry sales, as well as at the Longbranch Gallery in Mineral Point and at Paoli Road Mercantile in Paoli, Wisconsin.