How to make:
Wire and Resin Focals

by Tammy Vitale

Introduction

Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in this wire and resin, focal making tutorial!

Making wire and resin focals is a quick and extremely satisfying craft that has a lot of room for personalizing with your own imaginative finishing. Learn the skill once; expand, modify, add and delete to your heart’s content every after.

Finished wire and resin focals mount easily on cording, chains or beaded necklaces so they can be sold for very affordable prices, and they are wildly popular! (my favorite for keeping the price down is cording)

To the left is Margie Goodchild, a client in Australia. On her Facebook page (which is how we connected originally), Margie says: This is me in my fantastic new necklace made by Tammy Vitale ♥ I adore it! It just arrived in the mail :)

In fact, she is wearing the piece which is also on the cover of this tutorial. I have used my sketches for it as an example of setting up your design!

Enjoy!

Suggested process:
1. Read through the booklet once before you start
2. Assemble your equipment and supplies
3. Have fun!
Step 1. Gather your tools and supplies.

- Flat nose (pictured here) and round nose pliers (pictured in Step 5)
- wire clippers (heavy duty)
- scissors
- small wire file (pictured in Step 9), or emery board or nail file
- copper wire (or silver or whatever metal you enjoy working with), 14 – 16 gauge (approximately 10 – 12” per piece depending on finished size)
- wire 22 – 24 gauge (matching or contrasting), ½ round or regular round, 6 – 8”
- ICE Resin, www.IceResin.com. At this writing, July 2010, www.artbeads.com has the best pricing $23.97 for 1 – 2, but I encourage you to shop
- 2mm leather cording in your choice of color, 1 yard (or chain or beaded necklace supplies)
- large hole beads, or regular hole beads wire-wrapped for stringing
- “stuff” – charms, wire, beads, clock innards, sand, flowers, 4-leaf clovers, whatever catches your fancy
- words. I print them out with my regular printer on stock that is a bit heavier than regular but not as heavy as cardstock – play with what works for you.
- scrap pieces of cardboard or used watercolor paper
- ¼” and 2” masking tape
Step 2. Sketch Out Your Design

This is an example of my sketching out a design that I can wire together for stability.

Note the lower left design ends flush with the spiral extension, but the lower right has a tail that can be wired to the spiral ending – I need to visually see how the pieces fit. With a “tail” there is less chance that added beads will distort or pull the piece apart because the join gives the piece added stability.

You can make the join with a smaller piece of wire, as we shall see as we go along, or by twisting the main wire ends together.

Twisting the main wire ends together can create a large gap rising off the backing. Using small wire allows the final piece to lay flatter. Experiment and see which works best for you.

The actual design size is to the right and off the page. I used that for creating the piece on the front of this tutorial.
Step 3. Create your mounting/backer

- Start with your scrap cardboard about 2” wide (depending on your finished size) and 4” long. I like cardboard that is the weight of soda or beer cartons because it has a bit of flex and that allows the backing to adhere better to the wire.
- Cut a piece of 2” masking tape the same length as your backer cardboard. You don’t want it to overlap onto the back, because then it sticks to your working surface.
- Cut 2 3” – 4” pieces of ¼” masking tape. Attach the 2” masking tape, sticky side up, to the backer by securing it at its top and bottom with the ¼” tape as shown above and following.
The top picture here shows the back of the mounting cardboard. You need enough ¼” tape to fold onto the back and hold on the 2” tape securely. Make sure the 2” masking tape is flat with no wrinkles in it.

The 2nd picture is an example of overlapping two 2” pieces of masking tape to make a larger focal piece (see “Unfold/Imagine in the gallery).
Step 4. Finish the ends of your copper wire

This is just a nice finishing step and is not required. Take a small file (you can use an emery board or nail clipper file too), and smooth the end of your wire so that you don’t have any sharp, pokey pieces that can scratch the wearer.
Step 5. Start making your wire design

With the heart design shown on the cover, I bent the wire and added the spiral at the end of the design. In this design, I am starting with the spiral. Spirals are easiest with round-nosed pliers. Start the wire at its end on the small part of one of the plier sides, then push the wire into a circle shape. The pliers are only used to start the spiral.

**Note:** If you are not familiar with wire wrapping, you can go to Artbeads.com to learn how: [http://www.artbeads.com/wire-spiral.html](http://www.artbeads.com/wire-spiral.html). Or simply Google “how to make a wire spiral” – there are many free tutorials on the net, on YouTube and on private blogs. Browse until you find one that makes creative sense to you and play with it! If you haven’t done it before, it may take a bit of practice until it works like you want it to work.

Spirals are not required, and if you are more comfortable with straight lines, then use your flat-nosed pliers to create your focal piece.
**Steps 6 and 7. Bend the wire**

When I have the spiral I want, I bend the wires together with my flat-nose pliers so that they are touching. This will be held in place with a wire wrap at the end of the design.

I then continue to form the wire to my design with my flat-nose pliers. As you work, a space may re-open between your spiral and the rest of the piece. That’s okay. It’ll all pull together in the end.
Step 8. Finish the basic design of your focal.

Trim your excess wire with your heavy clippers.

Leave enough length to the wire so that you can wrap it all together (see next steps). If you aren’t sure how much to leave, it’s better to leave too much than not enough your first few times.
Step 10. Wire-wrap the ends together

Take your piece of 22-24 gauge wire and wrap the ends of your design together.

I prefer starting with longer ends so that I have something to hold onto as I wrap. I wrap in one direction and then clip the ends of the smaller wire to lay flat against the top and bottom of the wrapped space (not the front or back where it can scratch or snag). Half-round wire, with the flat part to the inside, wraps flatter and more uniformly, but round wire is fine (and pictured here) if you don’t want the extra expense or inventory.

I suggest playing with this until you find the way that is most comfortable for you to wrap. Some people start with a bend in one end and wrap from that. Some people make a “hook” around one side of their flat nose pliers and start with that. Experiment with this wire-wrapping until you are happy with the results.

See the picture on Step 11 for a close up of a finished wrap.
Step 11. Mount your focal on the masking tape backer

Although not pictured here, at this point, before you place your focal on the backer, you can texturize it by lightly hammering it or using screen, design dyes or other means to make marks in the metal. Then you can distress it (some call this “antiquing”) with liver of sulphur. I don’t find it adds that much to the finished piece, but you might want to try it and decide for yourself. You can also twist the wire – that adds nice movement and texture.

Place your focal on the masking tape backer. Now you will see why I like a backer with a bit of flexibility (although some use stiffer cardboard). You want the wire to be touching the backer all the way around the enclosed part. Ideally, this keeps leaks from happening with the resin [disclosure: as you will see from following photos, I am not very good at this. But in theory that’s the way it should work, and does when you don’t overfill and pay attention to this step]. If you need to remove the focal and tap the metal a bit to get it to flatten out, or use your hands to get it flatter, do so.
Step 12. Add your “stuff”

In this instance I have added a word phrase face down which will show up on the back side of this piece. The sticky up masking tape holds everything in place: a large cylinder bead, seed beads, watch cogs and a dolphin charm. Let your inner child out to play at this point!

Face up words can be added before you pour or floated on top of the resin after you pour. If you have nothing under it, adding words before you pour keeps them affixed where you want them. Floating them requires that you keep an eye on their position as the resin moves and takes the words with it.
**Step 13. Mix the resin**

ICE resin is a two part resin that is made for jewelry. It is nice and clear.

- Mark the body of your bottles and the tops with A and B. If you get the tops mixed up, the resin solidifies. Do this before you do anything so you know what goes where.
- Read the instructions that come with the resin.
- Spread out newspaper or plastic.
- ICE can be ordered in a package with measuring cups and stirrers. You mix 1 to 1, in this instance ½ oz and ½ oz. You can mix less (although the instructions say not to. I’ve done it and as long as you’re exactly 1 – 1 in the ratio, you’re fine). It’s easier to get it exactly right if you use this measure, so I make 6 or 7 focals at a time and do them all at once.
- Stir slowly with your stirrer for 2 minutes. The liquid will start with “lines” in it and then clarify. You want it to get to clear. You do not want bubbles. Slow and easy does it.
- Make sure your pieces are some place where they will not be disturbed for 3 days. That’s how long it takes to set. Before then it will take fingerprints nicely. If you want fingerprints, go ahead and handle.
• You can pour from the cup or get more bottles with plastic tips; however, these must be discarded after each use and I find that environmentally unfriendly. So I am experimenting with pouring.

• **Do not** pour the resin until it **mounds**. It looks great but spreads out over the next 24 hours and you will have a mess. This is experience talking.

• Pour until all the interior space is full. You need less than you think. Lately I have taken to using the stirrer as a way to drip the resin into the focal. This leads to a lot less spillage than you will see in the following pictures.

• You want the resin to the edge without spilling over. This takes practice and experience. It creates more work if it spills over but it does not ruin your design.

• If it should happen that you get a hole from a bubble or not enough resin, you can repour later. This is a very forgiving medium! Or use the hole to mount a wire-wrapped bead (that is, use your artistic imagination to make a “mistake” into something that works for you!)

• You have 20 minutes to play before the resin solidifies beyond pouring consistency.
Above left the focal piece Rise Up and Sing after I poured it. Above right after I trimmed and finished it.

**Step 14. Remove your piece after 3 day from its backer**

As you are peeling your focal off its backing, you will be able to tell if you need more resin or not. If you have enough, the piece is firm and all the interior pieces are securely set in the resin. If not, do not peel completely off. Re-set the piece on the masking tape for your next pour.

If it’s ready, and you have over-pour (or settle-out as the case may be), use your metal clippers or scissors to cut away excess resin. Then use your file (or emery board or nail file) to carefully file away any remaining resin.
Step 15. Finish

I knot the ends of my cording with slip knots, but you can also finish your cording as shown here: http://www.making-jewelry.com/How-to-Finish-Cord-Jewelry.html, mount your focal on a chain, or bead a necklace for it. Woo hoo! You’re finished and ready to wear it out and show off your awesome talents!

Congratulations! I know you will get many happy hours working with this medium!
Gallery of Wire and Resin Focals by Tammy Vitale

Artist and Business Coach Tammy Vitale has been a full time artist for almost 10 years. She developed and ran ArtsAlive!, a non-profit venue to bring diverse artists and art to her area. She was also co-owner and curator for The Wylde Women’s Gallery whose goal was to make a place for artists who “didn’t fit.” Her art is represented by a growing number of shops and small galleries in the continental United States and is collected by national and international clients. She likes to color outside the lines, and believes with all her heart that everything is connected and anything is possible.

Tammy uses her BA in Business Administration, her MA in Story and her on-the-ground experiences as a practicing artist to create a delicious how-to mix that helps Artists and creative Entrepreneurs piece together the puzzle of perfect peeps, products, pricing and places to sell.

For more creative how-to projects: check out “Creative Resources” on the navigation bar of Tammy’s website: http://www.TammyVitale.com.

For daily inspiration delivered to your inbox, sign up for Wylde Women’s Wisdom: http://www.WyldeWomensWisdom.com

366 days of women’s wisdom collected and created by Tammy just for you!