Creating a collage á la Miriam Haskell

Achieve a unique look using classic techniques

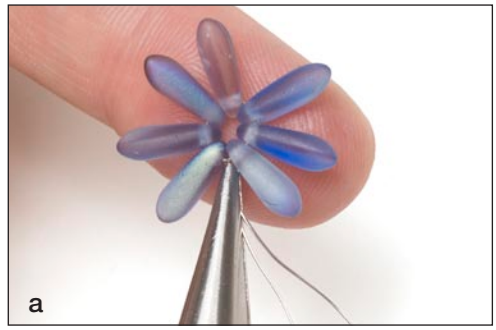
by **Diane Fitzgerald**

Today, Miriam Haskell jewelry is among the most collectible and sought after of 20th century costume designs. Her pieces, marked or even unmarked, often command high prices at antique shows and auctions. That Haskell's pieces were worn by such film stars as Lucille Ball, Myrna Loye, and Joan Crawford contributes to the aura and mystique of the genre. Studying Haskell's work can provide inspiration for our own creations.

The style of jewelry created by Haskell and her contemporaries — De Mario and Stanley Hagler, to name just two — often features a collage of components. Flowers, leaves, scrolls, and other shapes are attached with wire to a perforated plate. The back is a second plate, either solid or filigree, which is wired or clamped to the front plate. This process is sometimes referred to as "tapestry beading" or "cage work."

On the following pages, you'll find an explanation of some of the primary techniques and design ideas used in tapestry beading, several examples of pieces I've made in this style, and step-by-step instructions for making a small pin. With practice, you'll get comfortable enough to move on to larger, more complex pieces like the pendant shown at left. Although the technique is simple, your eye for composition will determine the piece's appeal.

For your first design, try a radially symmetrical pin or pendant made with large or boldly-colored beads arranged regularly around a central axis.



step*by*step

It is best to begin with an idea, theme, or sketch of what you'd like to make. Next, select your beads, buttons, and findings based on your idea as well as your palette of colors or shapes.

Making components

If you look closely at Miriam Haskell jewelry and the jewelry of her contemporaries, you will notice that components are often layered to create a rich and varied collage. Some components are only partly exposed and seem to peek out from beneath others.

Before you begin to construct your pin, assemble several components from your selected beads. This way, you won't have to stop to make a component, and you can easily try different colors and shapes as you layer the beads.

Petal or leaf sets

Petal and leaf sets are quick to make using elongated beads with cross-drilled holes at one end.

[1] Center five to seven cross-drilled beads on 4 in. (10 cm) of 28-gauge wire.

[2] With the beads touching each other, cross the wire ends to form the beads into a ring. If the beads are wide and do not lay flat, you may want to add seed beads between the cross-drilled beads. Grasp the wire ends where they cross with the tip of your chainnose pliers, and twist several times to tighten **(photo a)**. Trim the twisted wire, leaving a ⅛-in. (3 mm) tail.

If you have two or three flower-petal or leaf beads left over, you can use these to make a partial flower to tuck behind a larger flower.

Layered elements

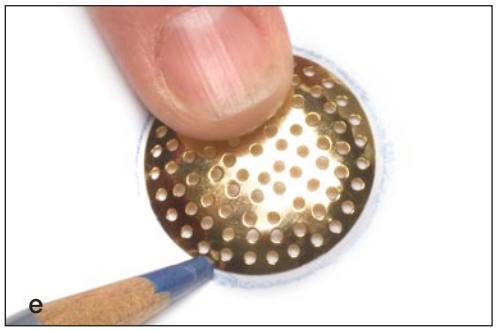
Components can be layered in advance and then treated as a single unit. Choose a simple pairing, like a flower bead and a rhinestone head pin **(photo b)**, or make something more complex, like a large flower with seed-bead stamens, a filigree stamping, and a couple of crystals **(photo c)**. You can also try combining metal leaves or flower shapes wrapped with seed beads or tiny pearls **(photo d)**, rhinestone wheels, charms, or buttons. Play with these and other elements to find a unique look.

Making a pin

[1] Trace the outline of a perforated finding on a piece of paper **(photo e)**.

[2] Select components and try various arrangements within the outline. **Photo f** shows a radially symmetrical arrangement and **photo g** shows the beginning of an asymmetrical arrangement. Layer petal and leaf sets with rhinestone wheels, bead caps, crystal head pins, buttons, or other interesting beads. You can use a digital camera to save images of the different arrangements you try.

[3] When you're satisfied with the


e


f


g


h


i


j


k

arrangement, begin attaching the beads and components to the finding (see "Wiring components to a perforated plate," below). To have your most important element showing prominently, it must be on top of the other elements. To do this, add the background elements first and the focal elements last.

[4] Once all the elements are wired in place on the front surface of the finding, attach the back **(photo h)**. Most perforated findings have little prongs that bend over the edge of the front to hold the pieces together. If your finding doesn't have prongs, wire the pieces together.

Your pin may be converted to a necklace by using a combination pin-back/bail finding **(photo i)**, or by attaching beading wire through holes in the perforated finding. If you plan to string beading wire through the finding, do so before you attach the back.

Wiring components to a perforated plate

Wiring components to the perforated plate results in a much more durable piece of jewelry than you would get if you sewed the pieces on with monofilament or even Fireline. Wired components must be absolutely tight so they do not move. If your piece is wobbly, it will have to be reinforced or reworked.

[1] Cut several 3–4-in. (7.6–10 cm) lengths of 28-gauge wire.

[2] Center a bead or component on a piece of wire, then pass each of the wire ends through adjacent holes in the perforated plate **(photo j)**.

If you are attaching a petal or leaf set, bend a piece of wire in half, and pass the bend over the wire between two beads. Pass each end through an adjacent hole **(photo k)**.

MATERIALS

pin or pendant 1½–2 in. (3.8–5 cm)

- 1–1½ in. (2.5–3.8 cm) perforated plate finding with an attached pin back
- assorted seed beads
- small assortment of beads*, buttons, or metal components such as charms or filigree shapes
- craft wire, 28-gauge
- chainnose pliers
- roundnose pliers
- wire cutters

** Be sure to include beads that are flat on one side or have cross holes on one end.*

As you gain confidence, try your hand at an asymmetrical design like the two pins I made (above) or the complexly layered floral spray by Ian St. Gielar (left).

Repeat several times until the ring of beads is secure.

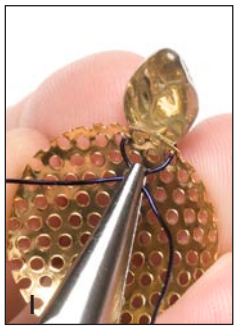
If you have only one wire end coming from a component, slide it through a hole adjacent to another component that has a single wire, and treat them as you would any other pair of wires.

[3] With the wire ends exiting the back of the plate, cross the left end at a right angle over the right end **(photo l)**.

[4] At the point where the wire ends cross, grab them with the tip of your chainnose pliers, and twist to the right. Twist once, then move the pliers to the cross point closer to the plate and twist to the right again. Be sure the wires are still crossing at right angles as shown in **figure 1**. Do not simply twist one wire around the other as shown in **figure 2**. Continue twisting until you are certain the component is held firmly in place.

If the wire breaks, remove the component, insert a new wire, and begin again. You may wish to use a heavier gauge wire or reevaluate your technique. It takes a bit of practice to become good at this, so be patient until you gain some experience.

[5] When you are confident that the wires are twisted properly and that the component is firmly in place, clip the wire about ⅜ in. (1 cm) from the plate **(photo m)**, and fold it down flat. ●


l


m

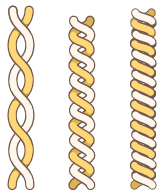
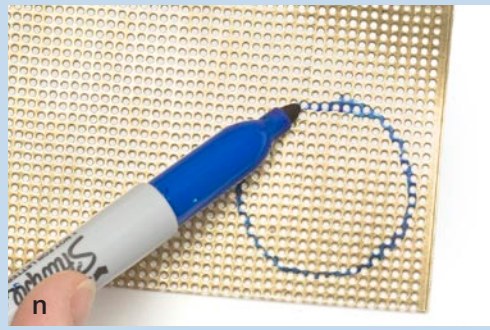


FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2

Fig. 1: Correct: Twist begins with a cross and the wires are tightened progressively. Fig. 2: Incorrect: One wire is straight with the other wire twisted around it. The straight wire has no holding power.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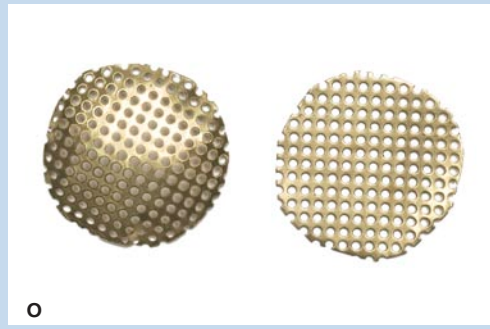
o


p


q


r

Do-it-yourself findings

Sometimes it is difficult to locate perforated plate findings, or you want to use a shape that doesn't exist. Here are some options for making your own.

Perforated brass sheet

Draw your shape on a perforated brass sheet **(photo n)** (see "My favorite sources," p. 43). Using heavy-duty scissors, cut out two pieces. Dap (see "Dapping," p. 43) one of the pieces so that it is slightly concave, but leave the second one flat for the back **(photo o)**. File the edges if necessary. Attach a pin back to the flat piece with wire. Once all your components are wired in place, wire the front and back together **(photo p)**, tucking in the wire ends as you work.

Shrink plastic

Shrink plastic may also work to create the finding you need. Cut the plastic to the desired shape so that it is about 33 percent larger than the desired size, perforate it with a ⅛-in. (3 mm) hole punch **(photo q)**, and heat according to the manufacturer's instructions. After wiring on the components and pin back, cover the back with Ultrasuede.

Filigree plates

Filigree plates are thin, stamped metal shapes with open spaces. You may find them on old jewelry or from a supplier of this particular type of stamping (see "My favorite sources," p. 43). Because the holes are not spaced evenly, they do not work quite as well as the perforated plates. You'll need two of the same size, or you can wire two or more together to make a larger shape **(photo r)**. Dap the front piece and leave the back flat.

Dapping

A dapping block is a small cube of metal or hardwood with domed depressions of various sizes on each side. It is used to shape filigree pieces or perforated brass sheets into convex shapes in order to accommodate and hide wire used to hold components in place. Most dapping blocks come with one or more dapping punches **(photo s)**.

To change a flat piece into a convex shape, lay the filigree or perforated shape in the desired depression in the dapping block. Align a dapping punch with the piece, and tap gently on the dapping punch with a hammer **(photo t)**.

s

t

Getting inspired

In addition to many books on 20th century costume jewelry, including the work of Miriam Haskell, two books focus solely on her jewelry. *The Jewels of Miriam Haskell* by Deanna Farneti Cera (Antique Collectors' Club, 1997) offers an overview of her career and the work of her chief designers as well as full-color photographs of more than 200 examples produced by her company. *Miriam Haskell Jewelry* by Cathy Gordon and Sheila Pamfiloff (Schiffer Books, 2004) provides practical information about construction techniques through both front and back detail images. Careful study of both books will help you appreciate the work involved in these pieces and the styles popular over the last century.

Another option is to create a scrapbook of your favorite images gleaned from antique jewelry sources on the Internet, such as eBay, Ruby Lane, Morning Glory, and Sassy Classics.

Diane Fitzgerald is an internationally recognized designer and beading instructor. She is the author of nine beading books, and is a sought-after teacher at the Bead&Button Show each year. In 2007, Diane taught a master class titled The Jewels of Miriam Haskell, *which this article is based on. Diane makes her home in Minneapolis, Minn., but travels widely, imparting her vast knowledge to eager students. To see more of Diane's work, visit her Web site, dianefitzgerald.com. Contact Diane at (612) 333-0170 or dmfbeads@bitstream.net.*

Diane added interesting lines and movement to the white, black, and topaz piece below by including short sections of beaded memory wire that extend beyond the edges of the base.

My favorite sources

Perforated brass sheets
K&S Engineering, Chicago, Ill.
ksmetals.com
6 x 12 in. (15 x 30 cm) structural sheet with .057 holes
Stock No. 06411; $15.99/sheet

Vintage and vintage-style beads and findings
A Grain of Sand
agrainofsand.com

Beads World, Inc.
beadsworldusa.com
1384 Broadway
New York, NY 10018
(212) 302-1199

B'Sue Boutiques
bsueboutiques.com

Designer's Findings
designersfindings.net

Guyot Bros. Co. Inc.
guyotbrothers.com
Great brass stampings and filigree.

Jewelry Findings Online
jewelryfindings-online.com

Lorac/Union Tool Company
97 Johnson Street
Providence, RI 02905-4518
(888) 680-3236 or (401) 781-3330
Name tags, filigree, and motifs.

Newtique's Treasures
http://stores.ebay.com/NEWTIQUES-TREASURES

Ornamental Resources
ornabead.com
Large domed findings.

Ornamentea
ornamentea.com
Clasps, findings, and filigree.

Rings & Things
rings-things.com
Mesh front bar pins 1 in. (2.5 cm); #38-293
Swarovski fancy head pins; #46-372

Wolf E. Myrow, Inc.
http://closeoutjewelryfindings.com

Czech pressed glass
Beadcats
beadcats.com
The best range of colors in pressed glass beads.

Shipwreck Beads
shipwreckbeads.com
Great selection of rose montees and pressed glass.

Wood dapping blocks
Arlene Baker
ArleneBkr@aol.com