

▶▶▶ IN THE STUDIO



Wendy Wetherbee takes a break from working on a piece of jewelry in her Derry studio. A member of the Londonderry Arts Council, she's spent the last 20 years perfecting her craft.

A mix of Science and Magic

Wendy Wetherbee turns to nature when crafting her jewelry



Examples of Wendy Wetherbee's work include sterling-silver pendants, earrings, necklaces and rings.

Artists are often depicted making graceful strokes with their paintbrush across a canvas or snapping a beautiful landscape against a setting sun. But Wendy Wetherbee finds her art and beauty in a rougher, colder, noisier place: metals.

A painter and photographer who studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Wetherbee discovered that metalsmithing was her true artistic passion.

"Working with metals is a really cool

medium," says Wetherbee, who regularly shows off her work at fairs and festivals around the region.

"It's a mix of science and there's a little bit of magic that sort of happens in there. There's a little bit of math and there's a lot of art and skill. It's a mix of a lot of things that interest me."

Wetherbee, a Derry resident and member of the Londonderry Arts Council, began working with metals and creating handmade jewelry in the mid-1990s. She's spent the last two decades honing and developing her craft.

By KRISTEN GIDDINGS • Photos by TIM JEAN



Hammers that once belonged to Wendy Wetherbee's grandfather fill a tool drawer in her studio.

Rooted in family

Wetherbee's passion and skill for metalsmithing stems from roots within her family. Her grandfather was a metalsmith and first introduced her to the craft when she was a young girl.

A mostly self-taught metalsmith, her grandfather taught her the basics and passed down a handful of tips that she uses in her work today.

"One day it just sort of clicked," she says. "I need to do this. I want to do this."

But it is not just her grandfather's words

that have stuck with her over the years; Wetherbee actually uses many of her grandfather's old tools to create her jewelry.

Hammers in all sizes that her grandfather once held are within reach in her tool drawer. Stamps her grandfather designed are stacked within a large collection. The anvil she uses to hammer and shape her metal is the same anvil her grandfather once used.

Traces of her grandfather's touch spread to all corners of her workspace.

And while some people might be surprised to see a woman pounding pieces of



Wendy Wetherbee uses a hand saw to cut intricate details in a pendant.



A collection of metal punches help Wetherbee create her original pieces.

copper with a hammer or shaving away at sterling silver with a fine saw, the intricate details combined with the colorful stones that create the final product are nothing short of beautiful.

Inspired by nature

From rings and necklaces to earrings and bracelets, Wetherbee makes jewelry to adorn all.

She starts with a piece of metal, most often working with sterling silver, and uses different diameters of wire to carve her depictions. She either sketches a shape into the metal or pastes a silhouette to follow and saws out the design by hand.

Some pieces pop with color. Others are more elaborate in design. And some shine in their simplicity. But all of her work stems from the inspiration of nature.

"I am out in nature all the time and that's what inspires all my work," she says. "I go out into nature and take photos and everything flows from there."



Wendy Wetherbee uses a hammer and a steel punch to add design elements to a pendant.

Not only do the designs depict her appreciation and connection to nature, but her jewelry itself stands on that same foundation. All of the metal Wetherbee uses in her jewelry is recycled.

"All of my stuff is really nature inspired, so for me, it would not make sense to use things that were damaging

to the Earth," Wetherbee says. "I try to be as eco-friendly as I can."

As she hand-fabricates all of her work — no help from power tools or machinery — some of her pieces can take up to 10 hours to make. She can craft her smaller rings and more simple designs in a couple of hours, she says, but the

more complex and the more detailed the piece, the more time Wetherbee gives to the work.

Part of the magic that her handmade jewelry brings is the unique attention to detail. As each item is made with individual care, Wetherbee often likes to include a design on the back or inside of her pieces, hidden at first view.

It's her way of adding "a little secret" with her creations.

Opening up her art

With greater attention to detail and effort comes a greater price tag. Wetherbee says some of her more time-intensive, complex pieces with several layers and/or stones can cost up to \$1,000.

"This is not a hobby you can have if you're not going to sell your stuff," she says, noting the hours she devotes to creating her jewelry every weekend and several nights a week — in addition to running a full-time, self-employed creative/marketing firm.

However, making her art available to anyone interested in her work is important to her. So in addition to pieces costing several hundred dollars or more, Wetherbee makes smaller necklaces costing around \$85 and stamped rings starting at \$30. She



Polished cabochon stones await placement in one of Wendy Wetherbee's creations.

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All of Wendy Wetherbee's pendants include an added design element on the back.



A finished sterling-silver pendant features one of the cabochon stones.

also accepts requests for custom work.

Wetherbee sells her work online at her website, puredichotomy.com, as well as at many craft and art shows. You can also see her work at Artful Things of New Hampshire at 39 E. Broadway in Derry.

For Wetherbee, one of the best parts about being an artist is bringing the creative process into the public eye.

"I really feel strongly that doing art and making art in front of people is really helpful to kind of grow the education of the public, because a lot of people appreciate art, but don't have a clue how it's made," she says. "So when they get a little feel for how a painter paints or watching a metalsmith work, or a potter, it kind of opens their eyes."

Wetherbee hopes that by opening up her art — as other artists do as well — will help draw interest and much-needed volunteers to the Londonderry Arts Council.

Much like her grandfather inspired her love of metalsmith, Wetherbee finds meaning in sharing her art with children.

"It's great to see kids get excited about it, because that's who's going to be the next generation of creative people." ▲