

Clean Up Your Act

Filing and finishing can make you or break you. After investing countless hours on the design and fabrication of a piece, an unsatisfactory finish can be a real downer that can destroy your hard work. It takes discipline, diligence, and patience to properly finish jewelry. This month, I've invited three experts to reveal their jewelry finishing secrets. Here's what they told me.

Michael David Sturlin

One of the tools I find essential for the "finer points" of intricate jewelry work is the escapement file. They are commonly used by goldsmiths and stone setters to do fine finishing or detail work, and might be thought of as the needle file's smaller cousin. Many metalsmiths might be unfamiliar with them, but of course, everyone loves them once they have been properly introduced.

Escapement files allow access to the tiniest areas. In places where it is not easy to polish, a beautiful finish can be achieved using a #6 file to produce an even, consistent surface. This finish is appropriate on the inner edges of openings in pierced gallery or bezel walls, on square azures for the pavilions behind gemstones, or anywhere else a precise, controlled surface is desirable. Cutting edges vary in length, depending upon the shape of the file, and as with many tools, they can be modified. A safety edge polished on the side of a barrette or equaling file makes it more user friendly for finishing prong tips around fragile gemstones. I find them indispensable for filing the inside edges of channels, the openings of clasp housings, and anywhere else that their larger cousins can't access.

I also use these files in a slightly different way than the standard approach to filing. I frequently use a vertical motion — the same movement as with a jeweler's saw frame. I hold the base of the file handle between my thumb and index finger, placing my middle two fingers against the back of the file to stabilize it and direct the downward stroke. I support my item over a cutout in my bench pin and make short strokes with the file in a very controlled up and down movement. This enables me to keep a perfectly square or perpendicular edge when filing the inner walls of an opening. This is harder to control when using the file in a more typical horizontal stroke. Using the file vertically also

allows the eye to see the work more clearly because the file is not obstructing the view.

To achieve a highly polished surface, after filing with a number 6 escapement file, wrap a narrow strip of 2/0 polishing paper tightly around the file and go over the surface again with smooth even strokes. Repeat with 4/0 polishing paper. *Voilà!* A nicely polished edge using just a file and paper!

Michael David Sturlin is a studio jewelry artist, educator, and award-winning goldsmith. He has been creating imaginative, elegant jewelry for three decades. Michael is a respected teacher, offering jewelry classes, goldsmithing workshops, and professional development seminars. He is a member of the faculty of the Revere Academy of Jewelry Arts, SNAG, and the Jewelry Design Professionals Network.



Tom and Kay Benham

To prevent a buildup of metal in the teeth of our files, we rub blue carpenter's chalk from the hardware store across the file's teeth when first acquired. We clean the teeth with a fine metal brush and rechalk as needed. This treatment keeps our files clean and helps prevent rust. Children's sidewalk chalk will also work.

A piece with small holes or grooves is difficult to access for sanding and polishing. Many flexible shaft tips are too large to reach into nooks and crannies or may distort original shapes of the openings. Luckily, there's an age-old, low-tech solution called thrumming. Attach a bundle of cotton string to your bench. Charge it by rubbing with cutting or polishing compounds, such as Tripoli or red rouge, having a separate string bundle for each compound. To thrum, feed an appropriate number of strings through the opening and rub the piece back and forth. For crisp edges, hold the string(s) taut; for rounded edges, hold them loosely. Our bundles are about a dozen 36 to 40 inch lengths of medium weight cotton household twine. We hold the lengths together, fold them in half, and tie an overhand loop which hangs from a small hook in the workshop. To avoid drilling another hole in our bench, we used an old key ring and a carabineer attached to the flexshaft stand.



Contributing Editors Tom & Kay Benham are active lapidaries, goldsmiths, and members of the Florida Society of Goldsmiths and the Pinellas (FL) Geological Society. They teach intarsia at the William Holland School of Lapidary Arts (GA) and Wildacres Retreat (NC), and metalsmithing in the Orlando area. Their projects appear regularly in Step by Step.



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