

Wire-Wrapping
Supply
List

- 1) Felt-tipped pen
- 2) Tape measure
- 3) Round needle-nosed pliers
- 4) Smooth flat pliers
- 5) Wire cutters
- 6) Polishing cloth
- 7) Masking tape

Please be sure the tools have no ridges. Not necessary but if you have please bring:

- 1) Ring Mandrel
- 2) Pin Vice

Tools, tools, tools: The fundamentals

by Helen Goga

THE DICTIONARY defines *ability* as "the quality that makes an action or process possible; the capacity or power to do something; cleverness, talent".

Wire artists know that their success lies in their ability to handle their tools and control the wire: the ability to use hand tools has a direct impact on the wire. So it comes as no surprise that, whenever wire artists meet, they should talk about wire and what neat tools they have just bought. In fact, talking about pliers is probably the one thing they are most willing to share. But, make no mistake — "You toucha my pliers, I breaka you face!"

Their love of hand tools is not the only thing they have in common. Many are confirmed toolaholics and are proud of it. Legends have been

shared about particular artists and the incredible number of tools they own: these stories often precede them. This poses many questions, such as: Why? What early life trauma led them to this? and Have they ever considered seeking help?

When watching a wire artist choose their hand tools, you will notice their nimble fingers expertly sliding up the handle and over the jaws while the vinyl cushion grips slip into their waiting palm. These artists are adept with their hands, but

some careful observers have reported seeing a quick, frisky pinch of the vinyl. You might hear a soft exhalation and a just-audible moan as their eyelids flutter for an instant, or you may see them replace the pliers with a "hmph" and an air of dismissal.

What are they looking for? As a general rule, not much. But that "not much" is sure hard to find. For example, when evaluating round-nose pliers, the wire artist is looking for a truly ROUND jaw — not one that is oval, or has ridges or flat spots, because they know all of their loops, coils and circles will reflect whatever they have seen and felt on the surface on the jaw. This jaw MUST be smooth so as to not scratch the surface of the metal. The artist will also judge the space between the

jaws, determining whether the wire will be held securely: if the space is too wide, the wire will slip.

Inexpensive pliers

It is very likely that the first pair of pliers ever purchased by our wire artist friend were inexpensive ones that didn't last because of their construction. Box-joint construction outlasts and outperforms all other types; it keeps its precise alignment, never loosening or wobbling, and opens and closes smoothly.

Knowing the long hours they will be holding the pliers, the artist tests how it feels in their hand: the tool must feel comfortable. Manufacturers understand this need, offering plastic- and foam-grip handles. This not only provides grip but gives some insulating qualities.



A sample of pliers that any wire artist would be proud to own. Clockwise, from the bottom (the Wire Artist coiling pliers): Bent chain-nose, end cutters, round/flat-nose, combination, chain-nose, slim flat-nose, flat-nose, side cutters and needle-nose.

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The same criteria apply when evaluating flat-nose pliers but, because the pliers will be used for different purposes, a few more attributes are added to the "wish list." For example, flat-nose pliers come in different sizes; the size will determine their application. Wide-nose pliers could be used to bend over the end of the wire when you begin your bindings, but wouldn't work well for tight spots such as those in many of the ring designs. Tapered, slim, flat-nose pliers would work well for these. As the inside surface of flat-nose pliers may be either smooth or serrated, the wire artist makes sure that the surface is smooth.

Cutter and nippers may be purchased as sidecutters or end cutters. The shape of the edges of the jaw will determine how the ends of the wire will be cut, allowing for either a flush or semi-flush cut. A flush cut is one in which the edge of the wire is cut off squarely, whereas a semi-flush cut leaves a point on the end of the wire. Depending on the need and the desired end result, both types of pliers and both types of cuts are useful.

These are the three basic tools required to start a career as a wire artist jeweller. There are combinations of these, such as pliers that have one round-nose jaw with an opposing flat-nose jaw, rosary pliers (which are round-nose pliers with a side cutter) and so on.

Specialty pliers

There are, as well, specialty pliers such as coiling pliers or bent chain-nose. When an artist needs the tapered jaw of a round-nose plier but the flat surface of a flat-nose plier, they may use chain-nose pliers, appreciating that the jaw edges are bevelled to prevent the marring of soft wire. The choice made is a matter of personal preference and technique. All one has to do is check out catalogues of tools, supplies and equipment for technicians and craftsmen to see all the variations and choices available.

Complementary to these hand tools, wire artists frequently use pin vises, ring mandrels, jewelry (or bench) vises, calipers, rulers, pocket- or penknives, jewellers' files, ring sizers

and an opti-visor.

In defence of all the many plier enthusiasts you may meet, wire art is really a study of how wire is successfully manipulated into a certain shape. The tool used to do this is just an extension of the artist's hand and should be used to guide the wire into place without undue pressure or force. Because the tool is so critical, it comes under scrutiny. As an artist becomes more involved with the artform and begins to play with design, it is

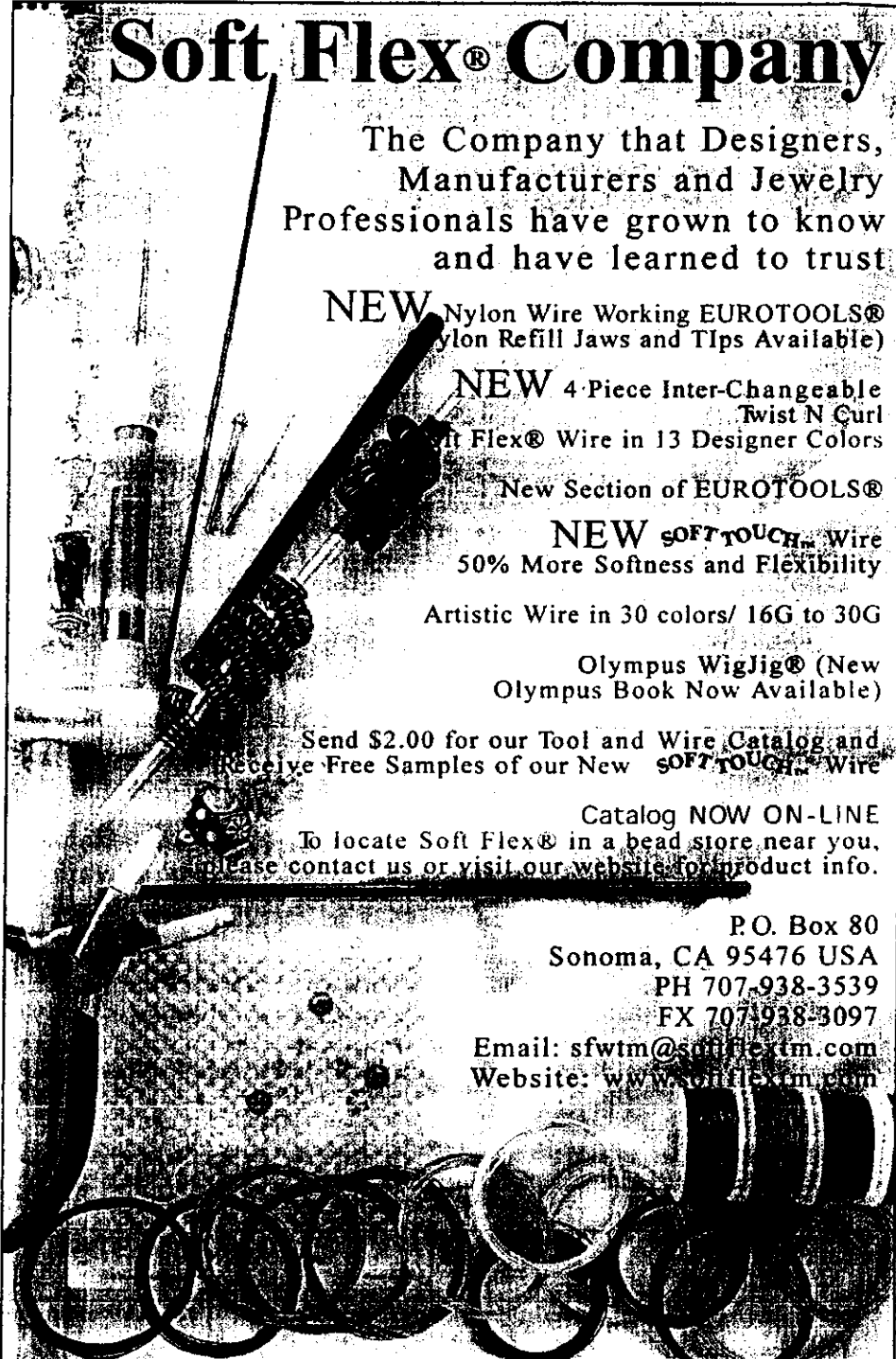
inevitable that specific tools begin to find an exact use; hence, the 101 pliers.

Intimate relationship

Oh, remember that frisky pinch? It's just an invitation to a more intimate relationship! And how do I know that (you might ask)? Let's just say that I, too, have been observed.

Now do you understand? I don't really need help.

Honest . . .



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