

Organic Jewelry

By: Thomas J. Tessier



Equipment Used:

1. 3 gms of Art Clay Silver
2. Bottle of Art Clay Silver Paste Type
3. Art Clay Silver Syringe Type plus medium & fine tips
4. #2 flat artist brush
5. 6 inch square Ceramic Tile
6. Small roller frames, plastic slates, or playing cards
7. Clay roller of your choice
8. Clay pick for cutting clay
9. Clay cutter
10. Spatula
11. Pair of small scissors
12. Course/Fine sanding sticks
13. Heat source to dry clay – food dehydrator, electric grill, or air dryer
14. Heat source to sinter the clay – programable kiln
15. Means to burnish project – large rotary tumbler or magnetic burnisher
16. Flat Nose Pliers
17. Small straw
18. Small brass round punch
19. Stone setting tweezers

20. Small round brass clay punch (1/4 inch or smaller)
21. Earring posts – 7/16 X 0.36 inches

Optional:

22. Two 3mm faceted stones
23. One 6X3mm marquis stone
24. Pair of earring post/pads
25. Power tool (Foredom, Dremel, etc.)
26. Ball burr
27. Cylinder burr

The purpose of this article is to discuss the fabrication of simple pendants & earrings using nature as your guide. I'll illustrate using leaves, but consider what other things can be used (e.g. twigs, acorns, seashells, flowers, etc.)

Step #1 - Gather your organic forms, also known as leaves

Take a walk around your yard and/or neighborhood and find some acceptable leaves. The leaves should be a size that will look good on you. For a pendant, maybe in the neighborhood of 1 to 2 inches. For earrings, maybe in the neighborhood of 3/4 to 1 inch. The size is a personal call, but consider how it's going to be worn and what its final weight is going to be. The leaves that you choose should also have well defined veins creating a nice texture on the back of the leaf.

From a bush in my backyard I found these leaves. I have no idea of what kind of plant it is, but it has great looking leaves.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Notice how well defined the veins are as seen on the back of the leaves (Figure 2). I choose these three leaves to make a matching pendant and earring set.

Step #2 – Making your greenware

The next steps are common to whatever jewelry piece you are going to make out of the leaves. Start by adding some paste into another small container that is easy to access. I'm using a small ramekin, but any suitable container will work.



Figure 3

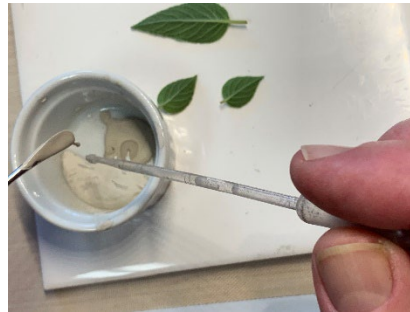


Figure 4



Figure 5

Add several scoops of paste to your container. Then add water with a eye dropper. Add several drops, then mix well with your spatula. Continue to add water until the diluted paste is about the consistency of a light cream. Once you have it mixed, set your spatula aside for use later. Don't wipe the residual paste off. Let it dry on the spatula and you can scrape it off later with your fingernail into your paste recycling tray. The reason for diluting the paste is so the first several layers will penetrate down into all the nooks and crannies of the leaves.

Place your leaves on a suitable rigid work surface. I like using a 6 X 6 inch ceramic tile. I buy tile at my local Home Depot for around 50 cents each. Next take your small flat paint brush and apply the paste evenly all over the back of the leaf(s). The backside of the leaf is where the veins are sticking out. Your leaf(s) should be lying face down on your ceramic tile. Use your tweezers, or some other tool to hold your leaf down while you paint the paste on. If you are not carefully holding it down, the leaf will slide on the smooth ceramic tile when you brush.



Figure 6



Figure 7

Once the leaves are covered with paste (including the stem), pick up the ceramic tile and place it into your dehydrator. I run my dehydrator at 158°F. At that temperature it takes 7 minutes to thoroughly dry the paste. I keep a timer next to my dehydrator and just click it on once the tile has been placed inside. Be sure you don't forget the leaves in there, use a timer. If they dry too long, they will roll up, then fall apart when you try to unroll them. Of course I've never done that 😊 As soon as the paste is dry apply the next coat. You'll know it's dry when the paste is a uniform white/grey color. If it appears "blotchy" it's not dry. As the paste in your container dries it will get thicker and thicker, which is ideal. You should use 3+ layers of your diluted paste. If you run short, just mix some more up. If you have applied three coats and still have some left over, just keep

applying it until it's all gone. Don't rinse out the container. Set it aside and let the remaining paste dry. You can scrape it out later into your recycle paste tray.

Once you have used up all your diluted paste, start applying it right out of the paste bottle at full strength. I applied 3+ coats of the diluted paste and approximately 15-20 coats from the paste bottle. While the paste was drying in the dehydrator I used the 7 minute drying intervals to work on other projects, including more leaves and stone settings.

At this point you have completed the main body of your greenware. The next step will depend upon what you are going to use the piece for. For the small leaves, I'm going to make earrings so I need to attach earring posts before I fire them. For the larger leaves, which will become pendants I need to make bails.

Step #3 – Attaching Posts and Making Bails

For traditional jewelry fabrication, the jeweler would simply solder the posts on after the earrings have been fired. I'm guessing a lot of you don't know how to properly solder a post on, so I'll give you a couple other easy way of attaching the posts. Simply roll out a small amount of clay to 0.75 mm (3 cards) thick. Use a small round punch and cut out several discs (Figures 8-10):

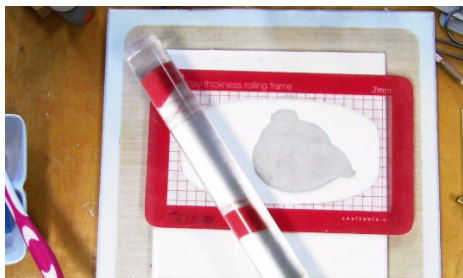


Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

Apply a drop of paste on the leaf where you want to attach the post. Carefully pick up one of the discs with a clay cutter and transfer it to the leaf. Use your small paint brush to center it and smooth any excess paste. Use the tip of your finger to carefully press down on the disc to make sure it's firmly in place. Next pick up one of the posts with tweezers or jewelers' pliers and push the post down into the center of the disc. It will stop when it hits the dry paste that's on the leaf. Do the same with the other earring. Place the leaves into the dryer again and dry the piece. When you take the leaves back out of the dehydrator, the posts will probably be loose. That's because the clay shrunk a little. Just remove the post and back fill the hole with a little syringe, then reinsert it back into the disc. If you haven't worked with earring posts before, the end of the post that has a small groove is the end that sticks out. The smooth end goes into the clay or gets soldered on if your soldering. Once you're happy with the earrings go ahead and fire them or wait until the pendant is done and fire them with the pendant.

Another way to attach earring posts is to use earring pads, they are available from Art Clay World (artclayworld.com). The post already has a pad attached to one end. These are made to glue to the back of an earring, but you can embed the pad on the back of the earring with paste and/or syringe (Figure 11).



Figure 11

Now to the bail. All you really need is a small cylinder for the chain to go through. The cylinder will be attached to the leaf stem with a little syringe type. You can make a natural looking cylinder by applying syringe type to a straw (Figure 12). If you are not use to using a syringe, not a problem. The uglier the better. You can apply the syringe directly on the straw. After it dries, you can simply slide it off. If you're not liking the way it's turning out, simply wipe it off with your finger or a tool and start over.



Figure 12

Another way to make the cylinder is by rolling out some clay to 0.75 mm (3 cards) and cutting a strip out. Then roll the clay around the straw, overlapping itself. Cut the clay at the overlap with a clay cutter or craft knife and remove the unneeded pieces. Attach the two ends together with a little paste or syringe.

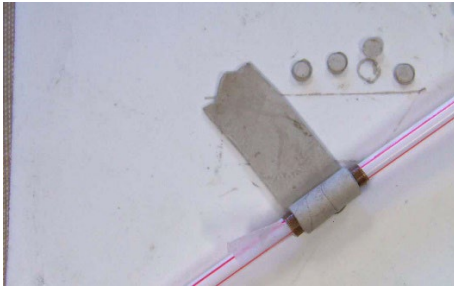


Figure 13

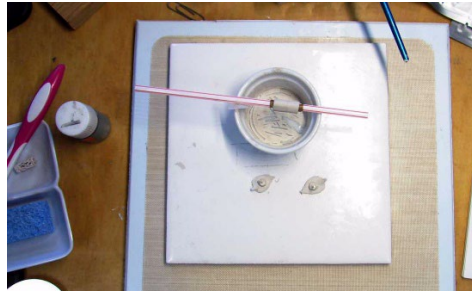


Figure 14



Figure 15

Dry in the dehydrator. Once dry use a power tool and a round burr to drill random holes into it. A cylinder burr can be used to dress up the ends (Figure 14). Additional paste type can then be applied with a small brush to give it a textured look. Attach this cylinder, like the others with a little syringe type to the stem (Figures 16). Look at another pendant with the cylinder made with syringe on the straw (Figure 18). Notice how more natural it looks, than the straight cylinder (Figure 17).



Figure 16



Figure 17 - After Firing

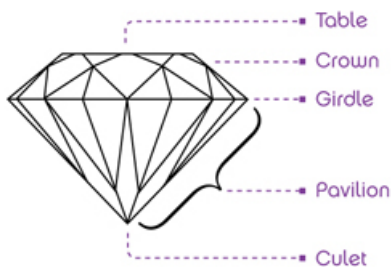


Figure 18 - After Firing

After drying thoroughly in the dehydrator, the pendant is ready to fire with the earrings.

Step 4 – Attaching Stone Settings (Optional)

First of all, if you haven't worked with faceted stones before, here is simple diagram with the appropriate terminology:



If you've worked at all with metal clay, you know you can attach one piece of greenware to another with some paste or syringe. What about attaching greenware to pieces that are already fired and tumbled? As it turns out the answer is yes. Look at the pendant/earring set in Figure 17. This photo was taken prior to stone settings being attached. The first step is to make the settings.

For these settings, I'm going to use faceted 3mm emerald green stones for the earrings and a 6X3mm emerald green marquise for the pendant. These too are available from Art Clay World in Chicago. To make the settings, simply set the stones lying on their tables with the culets pointing up on your work surface. Again I'm using a ceramic tile that I've put a light coating of Badger Balm on. The Badger Balm acts as the release. For the earrings I place three 3mm stones on my tile. Then add a small log of clay between them (Figure 19).

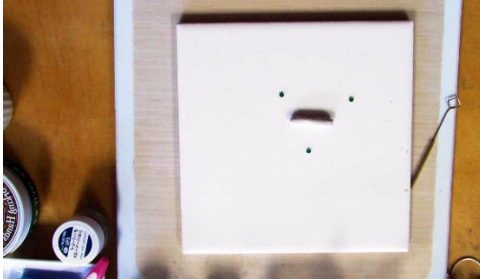


Figure 19

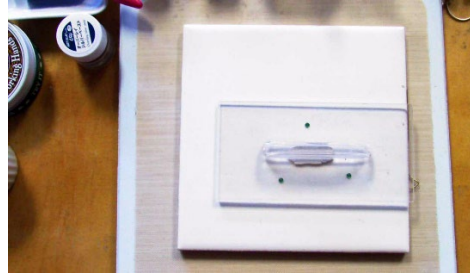


Figure 20

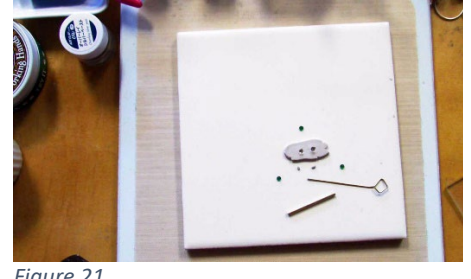


Figure 21

Next press the clay flat with a piece of plexiglass or a snake roller. Push down until the plexiglass is flat on top of the stones (Figure 20). Now use a small straw or brass tube and punch out two holes. The hole size needs to be smaller than the girdle of the stone, but larger than the culet (Figure 21). If you place a straw/tube down over the culet, it should stop 1/4-1/2 down the stone. Now using your tweezers, place two of the stones, culets first down into the holes. Push them carefully down into the clay with your snake roller until the tables are flush with the clay (Figure 22). Next use your clay cutter and cut the excess clay back from the stones. Leave at least 1mm of clay around the stones (Figure 23-24). Put them in the dehydrator and dry them thoroughly.

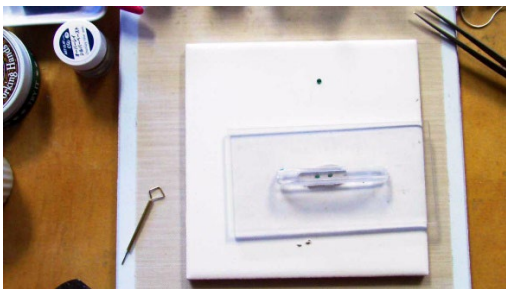


Figure 22

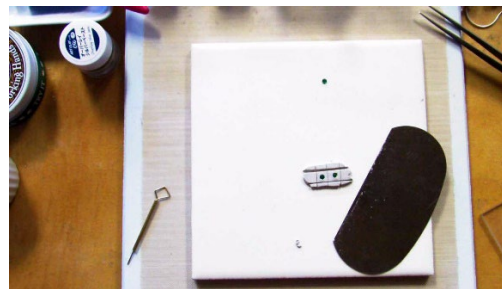


Figure 23



Figure 24

Once they are dry, use sanding sticks to form their final shape. Since the leaves are oval, a round shape would probably look better than say a square. It's your call. Now on to the marquise. Same idea, place the stone on your tile, culet side up (table down). Put a pea size clay ball next to it. Using your snake roller like before press down on the clay, keeping the plexiglass parallel to the ceramic tile until the snake roller hits the stone.

Now punch out a small channel into the clay to receive the stone. I used a small cocktail straw (Figure 25-26). Using your tweezers, pick up the stone and place it culet down into the hole in the clay, then push it in with your snake roller (Figure 27).

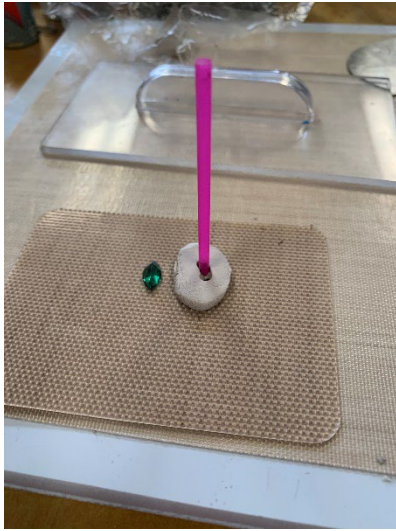


Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27

Same as before, use your clay cutter to remove the excess clay around the stone (Figure 28-29). Be sure and leave at least 1 mm around the stone. Dry setting in your dehydrator, then finish it with sanding sticks (Figure 30).

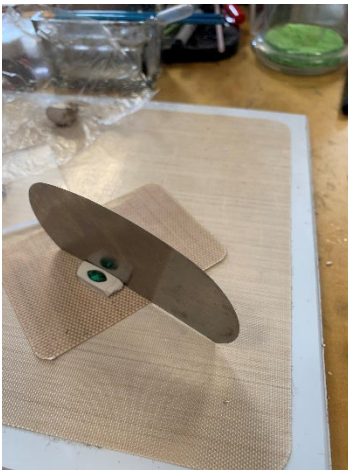


Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 30

Now that you have all three settings sanded and shaped to your liking you are ready for the pre-firing stage. Set the earrings post side down between two kiln self supports if you have them. If not, two pieces of wood, or a couple of rubber blocks. Just about anything that will support them (Figure 31). Place your marquise stone on your pendant where you want to attach it and draw a line around it with a fine Sharpie pen (Figure 32) for reference.

Now using a small paint brush put a coating of Art Clay Silver Overlay Paste on the earrings and pendant where the stone will attach. Also paint on a layer of Overlay Paste on the bottom of the stone settings where the stones will meet the earrings and pendant. Place all the pieces into the dehydrator and dry again. After all the pieces are dry attach them with normal Art Clay Silver Paste or Syringe. Since the surfaces of the leaves are rather deeply textured I prefer using syringe. It fills up the valleys between the leaf veins better. Clean up around the settings with a moist small paint brush. If there are any gaps under the stone settings, fill them in with a little more syringe and/or paste. You can also add some additional paste with a brush to the setting surfaces if you would like more texture on them. Now re-dry the pieces in the dehydrator again. The last step is to use a toothpick or bamboo skewer and scrap off any paste that may have ended up on and around the stones. If you don't clean all the stray clay, it will sinter right on the stone. After scraping any foreign clay, brush it away with a small stiff brush. A small stencil brush works well (Figure 33).

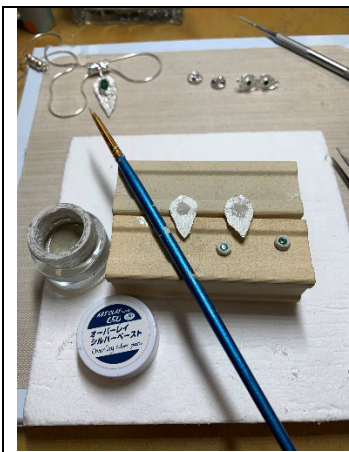


Figure 31

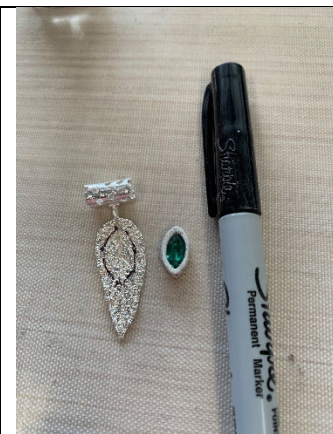


Figure 32



Figure 33

Now your ready to do the final firing. I have found that some stones will change color when fired, like these green emeralds. They change color to brown if I fire them at the standard 1,472°F, but not at 1,200°F. To be safe, fire them all at 1,200°F for 30 minutes, unless you have previously tested your stones and know they won't change.

After firing, tumble or burnish in a magnetic burnisher. Attach a chain to the pendant and backings to the earrings. Enjoy!

Author:

Tom studied jewelry art at the Revere Academy of Jewelry Art in San Francisco, California in 2017 and graduated as a "Graduate Jeweler. Subsequent classes were taken at Silvera Jewelry School in Berkeley, California. One of those classes was an introduction to Art Clay, taught by Master Instructor Arlene Mornick. Additional Art Clay classes were taken with Arlene as well. In 2018, Tom received his Level One Certification and Senior Level Certifications. Tom teaches primarily in the Sonoma County area of California, one of the great grape growing areas in northern California. Tom's website and contact information is at:

www.tessierjewelry.com



Artist Philosophy:

Discovering metal clay has been one of the greatest joys in my life. I'm just amazed at how easy it is to work with and what beautiful pieces can be created in a relatively short amount of time compared to traditional jewelry. It's like magic. I'm so looking forward to taking more art classes that can be combined with metal clay and teaching what I've learned to others.