

# New Heights, Widths, Widths,

BY NINA GRACI

Standing in her forming studio, surrounded by hammers, stakes, and photo equipment, metal-smith Cynthia Eid is experiencing a *moment of excitement*. Even though she has finessed metal into altered states for 30 years, this decisive moment is always riveting. A sheet of sterling silver gleams on the workbench while Eid ponders its destiny. Her next move will, through muscle and mastery, transform it into jewelry, hollowware, or Judaica — almost at the drop of a hammer. But long before this sterling silver adorns a body, a table, or a synagogue, Eid must listen to the metal.

"I often feel like I am conversing with the metal," Eid says. "It tells me what it would like to do, what is difficult, and what it absolutely refuses to do. My designs emerge from these dialogs that ask 'What if I . . . ?' Taking those forks in the road gets the juices flowing and it gets really fun in the studio."

Eid's idea of "fun" is corrugating a sheet of metal, then using "Thor," the 50-ton hydraulic press she named after the Norse thunder god, to squeeze out the *Polka Dots* bracelet or *Convergences* teapot. "Fun" is hammering out a yard-high copper eternal light for a synagogue and setting a one-carat diamond into a forged gold ring.

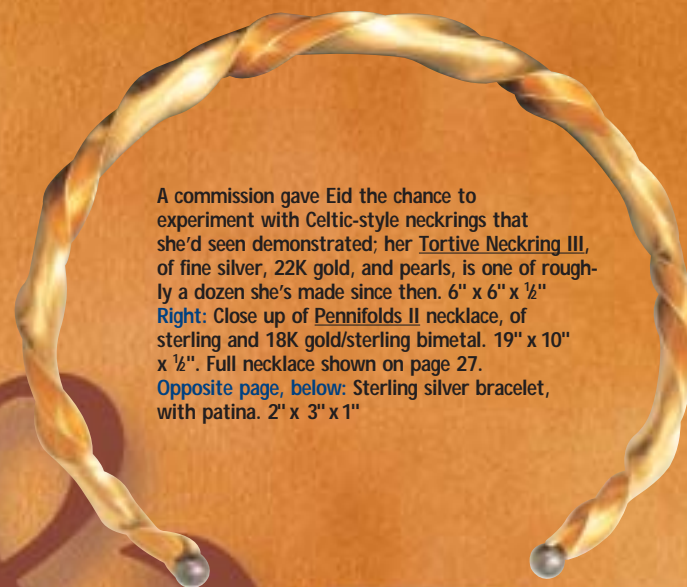
All photos by Cynthia Eid



Let Cynthia Eid walk you through making these earrings in "Black & White Ribbons" in **STEP by STEP**, page 52.

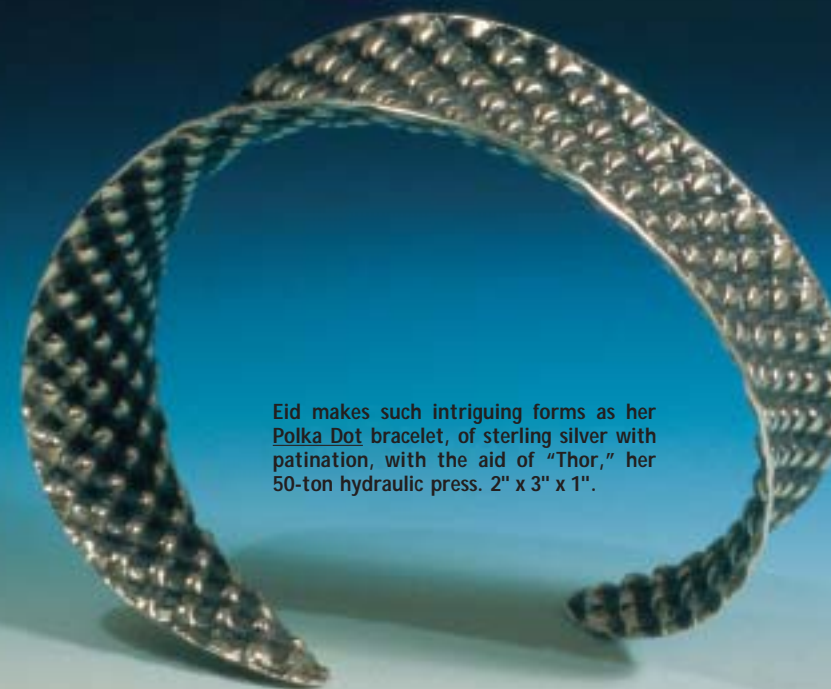


Jewelry artist Cynthia Eid creates intriguing, sinuous jewelry heavily influenced by her hollowware work.



A commission gave Eid the chance to experiment with Celtic-style neckrings that she'd seen demonstrated; her *Tortive Neckring III*, of fine silver, 22K gold, and pearls, is one of roughly a dozen she's made since then. 6" x 6" x 1/2"  
Right: Close up of *Pennifolds II* necklace, of sterling and 18K gold/sterling bimetals. 19" x 10" x 1/2". Full necklace shown on page 27.  
Opposite page, below: Sterling silver bracelet, with patina. 2" x 3" x 1"

# & Depths



Eid makes such intriguing forms as her *Polka Dot* bracelet, of sterling silver with patination, with the aid of "Thor," her 50-ton hydraulic press. 2" x 3" x 1".



Corrugation adds structural strength to metal, enabling Eid to make her *Bee Lines* earrings, of 18K bimetals and sterling. 4" x 1/4" x 1/4".  
Below: *Tortive* bracelet, of 18K gold/sterling bimetals and black onyx. 2" x 3" x 1/2".

## "New tools and techniques bump you out of a rut

"Shifts in scale can be difficult, but I like thinking and using different parts of my body differently and allowing the ideas to flow from jewelry to hollowware and back. Being a jeweler brings detail to the hollowware, and loving to hammer and form metal brings excitement and three-dimensionality to the jewelry. But whether metal is corrugated, fold-formed, or hammered, my goal is metalwork that looks fluid and natural, inviting closer inspection. I hope that only then will the viewer wonder about the technique."

**M**ETALSMITHS ARE FORMED, NOT MADE. Eid was born in Madison, Wisconsin, into a family that encouraged wonder and nurtured creativity. She grew up in the house her parents built, sat on furniture her father and grandfather constructed, and was surrounded by walls jammed with family art and her mother's woven wall hangings.

This was just the fertile ground Eid needed to explore the embedded notion that she could make anything — with the right tools, a few instructions, and a basement studio. From there, 14-year-old Cynthia began by melting paraffin wax and making candles. One day her brother handed her a new type of wax that she easily manipulated into her own designs. An art teacher taught her to transform wax into three sterling silver rings, and faster than you can say "jeweler," Eid bought a torch, saw, pliers, and files.

After two years of high school metalworking classes, she was hooked, and by her senior year at the University of Wisconsin she had won her first award. As she headed out to buy a down jacket with her prize money, jewelry professor Eleanor Moty suggested that she invest in a flexible-shaft machine instead. That was 1975.

"And it's still whirring in my studio! But back in school, I was intrigued by fibulas, and the fact that the functional components — the pin stem and catch — were all one. That concept is now at the center of all my work. I design in an almost subtractive manner, eliminating anything that seems extraneous and distracting, or that simply doesn't go with the rest of the design."

**F**ORGING A NEW PATH. Eid was strictly a jeweler — until she met Fred Fenster in her third semester. He taught her to forge,

## and take you down a new road or spark a new series."

raise, and think large. Working on hollowware was exciting and so too was the larger and less conservative jewelry she was now creating.

Shortly before graduating in 1980 with an MFA in jewelry design and metalsmithing from Indiana University, Eid headed for a Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG) conference in Tucson. Sharing a cab to the airport with a stranger was a lucky accident that resulted in a job. The stranger was groundbreaking jeweler Bruce Metcalf, the job was with a goldsmith in Boston. The job taught her a thing or two she'd missed in school.

"Benchmark taught me to think, design, and work faster," Eid recalls. "I now worked with gold, a material I had used for the first time when I made our wedding rings. [She married her husband, David Reiner, in 1979.] We had to borrow the \$200 to buy it. The engagement ring I made five years later. I also learned to polish correctly and efficiently and solder a post onto an earring without the use of a third hand. The next job taught me the basics of mold making and cutting, which led me to my last job at a gold jewelry factory in Boston. I was their designer, production supervisor, and model- and mold-maker. Oh, and expert at making box catches, which were then individually handmade for each bracelet," she laughs.

After five years of creating other people's designs, Eid was ready for some changes. There were two big ones in the next four years: sons Andy and Eric. Motherhood and metalsmithing didn't always coexist peacefully, but eventually her home-based jewelry business brought in enough to cover daycare expenses and buy her more time to hammer out her ideas.

"When I no longer had daycare bills to pay, I felt as if I had received a grant and could take more chances with my work. I now had more time to create *art* jewelry. In 1990 my wonderful, generous mother-in-law inadvertently helped me start on a new thread when she commissioned a pin for her future daughter-in-law and instructed me to make something for myself, too. Well! Now I could justify making that time-consuming Celtic-style torque Fred Fenster had shown us. I made one that was 3/4" wide in sterling, and set rhodolite garnet bullets in the finials. It turned out so great I had it gold-plated and still wear this *Tortive Neckring* on big occasions. I've made about a dozen using a variety of techniques like fold-forming, anticlastic forming, and forging. I find,



A large percentage of Eid's work is hollowware, such as this *Convergences* teapot, of sterling silver, epoxy, and patina. 4 1/2" x 4 1/2" x 3"  
Left: *Pennifolds II* necklace, of sterling and 18K gold/sterling bimetals. 19" x 10" x 1/2". Detail shown on page 25.





Folded Floral Rings, of sterling silver/18K bimetal. Each ring is 1" x 1" x 1/4".  
Below: Cythia Eid

though, that not everyone is comfortable putting on a neckring, but despite the small buying clientele, I keep returning to it."

**A NEW TWIST.** By the time Eid's torque with black pearl encrusted ends won the MJSA (Manufacturing Jewelers and Suppliers of America) Award in 1996, she was ready to try something new. As though on cue, she discovered a daring new technique that would give her jewelry a new twist. Jewelry guru Charles Lewton-Brain (see "Dynamo with a Lilted Voice," September 1997) had a new approach to shaping metal, and he was ready and willing to share it.

"When I learned Charles was teaching a workshop in Portland, Maine, I signed up as fast as I could! We kept him demo-ing constantly for two days — we were all so hungry for information. Fold-forming was sheer fun! It was so exciting because it quickly and easily gave metal a complex, three-dimensional form, without much soldering. I took copious notes in class and followed Charles' advice to make every sample from my notes. It took me a week! Now, I love these forming processes especially because they lend themselves to the asymmetry and botanical and natural forms that I like to use. The spontaneity and exploration of fold-forming often result in exciting new forms — no wonder it dominated my work for so many years. It's now fully incorporated into my work process." A Pringles can full of Eid's favorite fold-opening tools, including one made of bone meant for book-making and a brass tool she made herself, is always kept close at hand. "It's thrilling to unfold the metal and watch a beautiful piece of jewelry emerge."



Over the years, Eid had taken little notice of tool trends, so she was surprised to find herself standing in Lee Marshall's workshop on the hydraulic press in 1998. Watching this "giant hammer" crunch metal into shapes, without the use of hammers or stakes, she was entranced. Any tool that eased the strain on her tendonitis-prone hands was returning to Boston with her. On her way out she picked up the fold-forming award for her neckpiece at the companion exhibition and placed an order for the 20-ton press.

"Lately, I've been having fun with the bracelet tools that accompany the hydraulic press," Eid says. "I especially enjoy the anticlastic tool set, which eliminates a lot of grunt work and produces a cuff bracelet so easily. [Anticlastic shapes are concave in one direction, like a saddle, while a synclastic shape is convex in both directions, like a bowl.] These tools allow more time to experiment with different textures and shapes: roller printed, microfolded, reticulated, inlaid, organic, geometric, tapered, straight, wide, narrow. So many possibilities, so little time!

"New tools and techniques bump you out of a rut and take you down a new road or spark a new series." Eid's latest toy is the MicroFold Brake, which corrugates metal. (See "Ripple Effect," December 2001, and "Textured Silver Pendant," by Jack Berry, May 2002.) Soft metal sheet is fed into it and corrugated metal with interesting new textures comes out the other side. Cross-corrugation and crimping the metal folds are just two of the many possibilities available. "What especially excites me is combining the corrugated metal with the deep draw tools in the hydraulic press. Another plus to corrugation is that it adds tremendous structural strength to thin metal. This allowed me to make the *Bee Lines* earrings,

which are four inches long yet made using 28-gauge metal. Strong, yet light and comfortable."

As every jeweler interested in record-keeping and self-promotion knows, once the piece is made, it should be photographed. "I learned how to photograph my work back in school," Eid says, "but it has taken years to master photographing jewelry." Recently, she wrote a handout on the subject that she gives out at her workshops, and which is available online at [www.silversmithing.com/1photo.htm](http://www.silversmithing.com/1photo.htm).

Even though she is booked with commissions into 2004, Eid couldn't resist teaching a two-day class this past February at Rio Grande's Catalog in Motion show in Tucson, especially when it was on making bracelets using her favorite tools, the hydraulic press and the MicroFold Brake.

"After spending time soldering to make bangles, and dealing with the frustrations of making the seams strong enough for forming, yet elegant enough for a finished bracelet, it was fun to introduce folks to the joy of deep-drawing a six-inch disc to make seamless bangle-size tubing."

For Eid, each day begins in her studio with a round of mettle meeting metal, in which sheer physical strength, abetted by tools and reinforced by technique, force metal out of its linear shape into jewelry resembling garden roots and undulating sea life washed up at the water's edge. Good jewelry elicits praise but successful jewelry, like Eid's, elicits an emotional response — wonder. As Emily Dickinson put it:

*Wonder — is not precisely knowing  
and not precisely knowing not —*

Twenty-two jewelry and hollowware awards confirm Cynthia Eid as an artist who has taken metal to heady new heights, widths, and depths. However, Eid is not only about metal. At the end of the day spent in enforced studio solitude, she is either teaching or offering online technical support. Once a month, she joins a group of local jewelers for an evening of "Forge and Gorge." Since 1980, they have shared potluck dinners, showed and critiqued work-in-progress, and discussed the trials and joys of jewelry making and selling.

"Discussions may run from pricing and sales strategies to booth designs and how to blend careers with home lives," says Eid, who treasures the connections with people whose experiences overlap and mirror her own. "These evenings are always uplifting and renewing spiritually."

On other nights, she plays banjo and bodhran, an Irish drum, in the Reiner Family Band. "I make music with my husband, David Reiner, my sons Andy, 17, and Eric, 14, who play fiddles, mandolins, electric bass, and piano. The music is an eclectic mix of American old-time, bluegrass, swing, and Celtic music styles, which we perform at festivals, parties, and dances." It is clear that Eid is carrying on the family tradition, providing the same kind of vital, artistic atmosphere for her children that her parents provided for her. ♦

Cynthia Eid's work may be viewed on her Web site, [www.cynthiaeid.com](http://www.cynthiaeid.com).

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