

TALENTS THAT KEEP HISTORY INTACT

A look at two exceptional silversmiths working at WJ Sanders

There are three different time honored methods of hand decorating metal: repoussé, chasing, and engraving. These techniques have been used in the W J Sanders workshop for the 100 years it has been in business.

Repoussé is a metalworking technique in which a malleable metal is ornamented or shaped by hammering on the reverse side. Chasing, also known as embossing, is the opposite to repoussé. Work on the metal is done from the outside. The two techniques are used in conjunction to create a finished piece.

ENGRAVING

Time honoured techniques for today

Embossing is still used today by W J Sanders to create some of Australia's most beautiful and unique trophies. Engraving is an important aspect of the business as the company is the custodian of many of the great trophy collections throughout Sydney. Many important and historic trophies have been vandalised by unsightly engraving or the records of previous winners faded due to the lack of permanence of computer engraving.

CANDELA RIVEROS and embossing

Candela Riveros learnt silversmithing (chasing, hand engraving and jewellery making) at Escuelas Técnicas Raggio in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This is a technical high school that combines vocational and general education. Candela entered the school at the age of 12, graduating with a diploma six years later. Raggio Technical School is the only institution in South America that offers a silversmithing course.

Candela arrived in Australia some two years ago speaking very little English. Her silversmithing skills are breathtaking, her comprehension of the English language in such a short time, amazing. Candela explains the processes she uses.

'The techniques I use depend on what kind of piece I'm going to work on. If it's a hollow piece like a cup, I'll fill it with chaser's pitch first. When I work on flat ware, such as dishes or plates, the piece is placed on a pitch-bed. This will prevent the piece to get smashed as I work.

Second, I add a thin layer of watercolour to the surface, and transfer the design (previously made on paper) using carbon paper.

Third, comes the chasing itself, using my chasers hammer and self-made chisels. This is

not like engraving on steel (as seen in some firearms and other weapons) because I don't cut (carve) the metal; I change its shape by repeatedly 'stamping' the chisel on it. There is no metal loss at all.

After the first stage of marking the lines, I'll proceed modelling the shapes and surfaces in the design. Each of these stages are completed using different kinds of chisels. Usually a basic chisel collection has around a hundred chisels, but this is never enough – the bigger the collection, the better. Depending on the design and shape of the piece, sometimes it is possible to emboss it, working on the reverse.

After the modelling is completed, textures will be added for visual effects. This is also done with chisels.

The main objective of textures is to increase the contrast in the patterns, leaving some smooth areas, and others with different rough or grainy appearance. Such areas will catch on a darker colour, because they cannot be properly polished, and therefore will oxidize with time. This also makes a chased piece more aesthetically pleasant, and therefore more valuable.

When the chasing is finished, the pitch inside is melted and the piece is emptied. Remaining traces of pitch are burnt and the piece is cleaned with a brass brush and/or with acid (pickle). Then comes the polishing process, which must be done with extreme care because, as it is an abrasive process, it may eliminate much detail of the chasing, including the textures.

Polishing over a chased surface is seldom necessary, but in such cases it's just a matter of seconds; just enough to brighten it up.'

About ENGRAVING

Cherie Ireland was introduced to engraving at a young age.

Her dad, Garry Evans, learnt his skills as a young man apprenticed as a die sinker and engraver by Angus & Coote. After a long career with Angus & Coote Garry successfully set up his own engraving business in Dee Why. Cherie as a child of six remembers practicing her writing on scrap metal using her dad's tools. She had obviously inherited her dad's skills and attention to detail.

Cherie was taught engraving by her father and later set up her own engraving business in the old Gowings building in Sydney, where she built up a prestigious list of customers such as jewellers Percy Marks, Angus & Coote and Hardy Brothers. Her career was put

on hold to raise a family although through raising three children, Cherie kept her hand in by continuing to work for the Royal Agricultural Society to ensure that their many historic trophies were beautifully engraved with the names of winners following each Easter show.

'Working for W J Sanders presented me with new challenges and opportunities. The silversmithing skills of the company meant that as part of the restoration process of historic trophies and chalices it enables me to replace bad engraving and also re-engage over any faded engraving. This engraving can then be silver or gold plated over thus making the restoration complete.'

After joining the company one of Cherie's first challenges was to feature engrave the Peter Brock Memorial Trophy. Brock died in a car accident only weeks before the scheduled Bathurst race. The organisers wanted a significant trophy made in record time to be unveiled before the race. Working with sterling silver means that a mistake can be very costly.

Fortunately, the engraving on this trophy completed late into the night, was beautifully executed. This has since become one of the most photographed trophies outside of the Melbourne Cup, putting Cherie's engraving on display at Bathurst every October.

Feature engraving is now an enjoyable part of Cherie's work, such as engraving the Royal Coat of Arms on the all sterling silver Queen's Cup and engraving the names on the trophies of the various horse racing events staged throughout Australia.

'When engraving names on trophies, one always has to remember that you are recording history. The name should be deeply embedded and the letters consistent in style and size. I am often amazed that some of the historic and expensive trophies that come in for restoration have been defaced by amateurish engraving. It's a shame.'

For W J Sanders, the talents of these two artisans brought together offers Australian



Candela Riveros decorating a sterling silver shield using the technique of chasing



Cherie Ireland engraving the Gold Logie

organisations the opportunity to create something unique and beautiful to record the achievements of their members for many years to come ●

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A set hand chased Australiana sterling serviette rings decorated by Candela Riveros



W J Sanders Australiana trophy, hand chased decoration by Candela Riveros



The Spada Shield commissioned for the RAN brings together the skills of both Candela and Cherie



Cherie Ireland engraving the sterling silver Peter Brock Memorial Trophy