

La crème de la crème

by **Ann Dee Allen**



Bead&Button readers and show-goers select the 10 best teachers in the U.S.

To identify our top 10 jewelry teachers, we ran a survey and asked respondents to write in the names of their favorite instructors. The survey was open to the public, and was answered by our readers, *BeadAndButton.com* visitors, and *Bead&Button Show* enthusiasts. At first we were ecstatic to receive 229 names of teachers, plus a cascade of compliments about them. We quickly realized, however, that we would have to name just 10 of these wonderful teachers to our list. Not all of the best teachers can be in our top 10, but the 10 people mentioned most in the survey are highly representative of all great instructors of beadwork, wirework, polymer clay, metal clay, and mixed media. **Our top 10 teachers for 2010 are:**

Marcia De Coster (a)

Business: MadDesigns

Teaches: Bead weaving with a focus on right-angle weave

Web site: marciadecoster.com

Blog: maddesignsbeads.blogspot.com

E-mail: See marciadecoster.com

“I want each student to build on fundamental skills so that he or she can realize a creative voice. My projects build upon current knowledge of one stitching technique so that students are able to produce a project and improve technique.”

Celie Fago (b)

Business: Celie Fago

Teaches: Precious metal clay, bronze and copper clay, 24k gold keum-boo, polymer clay, and metalwork

Web site: celiefago.com

E-mail: celiefago@comcast.net

“When it comes to teaching, preparation, knowing one’s subject, and organization, all go without saying. The one truly essential tool is patience.”

Diane Fitzgerald (c)

Business: Beautiful Beads

Teaches: Jewelry made with basic beadwork stitches including peyote, brick, netting, and Zulu stitches

Web site: dianefitzgerald.com

E-mail: dmfbeads@bitstream.net

“My goal in teaching is to give respect to each student, to give each person confidence in herself and her creativity, and to offer appealing designs that provide a means of self-expression and satisfaction.”

Mary Hettmansperger (d)

Business: Mary Hetts

Teaches: Mixed-metal jewelry, cold connections, woven and fiber-related techniques for jewelry design, basketry, surface design for quilting, metal clay jewelry, wirework, and peyote beading

Web site: maryhetts.com

E-mail: hetts@ctl.net.com

“Everyone has a playful side, although many people don’t allow themselves the freedom to explore it. I try to give students a fun, safe, and noncritical environment to find their creative voices.”

Lisa Niven Kelly (e)

Business: Beaducation, Inc.

Teaches: Wirework, metalwork, and off-loom beadwork

Web sites: lisanivenkelly.com, beaducation.com

E-mail: lisa@beaducation.com

“When teaching, I have two goals in mind: to teach students something new and useful and to ensure that they have fun doing it. I want to fill our class time with as much information as possible and make the experience enjoyable and fun.”

Laura McCabe (f)

Businesses: Just Let Me Bead, Laura McCabe Jewelry

Teaches: Bead weaving

Web sites: justletmebead.com, lauramccabejewelry.com

E-mail: justletmebead@gmail.com

“Teaching is about sharing a love of beads and beadwork and the camaraderie that comes from practicing and expounding upon an ancient craft. In sharing my enthusiasm for the materials and the art, I hope that I inspire others to find their own creative voices.”

Anne E. Mitchell (g)

Business: Anne E. Mitchell

Teaches: Ancient chain making, fine-silver metalsmithing, wirework, and PMC

Web site: annemitchell.net

E-mail: anne@annemitchell.net

“I teach techniques designed to encourage students to grow and explore their own creativity. The most important tool that I use is humor. By being accessible and attentive and making people laugh I help them relax, open up, and have fun.”



Cynthia Rutledge (h)

Business: Cynthia Rutledge Beadwork & Workshops

Teaches: Bead weaving

Web site: cynthiarutledge.net

E-mail: info@cynthiarutledge.net

“I teach beadwork to share the creative experience. Classroom camaraderie is based on sharing ideas about design and color theory and exploring the beading process. A great workshop generates the perfect conditions for inspiration, and inspiration leads to art!”

Kim St. Jean (i)

Business: Expressive Impressions, Inc.

Teaches: Cold connections and basic silversmithing

Web site: kimstjean.com

E-mail: kim@kimstjean.com

“When I was a schoolteacher, I had a poster in my classroom that still speaks to me: ‘Feed a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime.’ I love helping people learn.”

Sherry Serafini (j)

Business: Sherry Serafini Beaded Adornment

Teaches: Bead embroidery, design and color concepts

Web site: serafinibeadedjewelry.com

E-mail: sserafini1512@comcast.net

“I stress individuality and exploring one’s inner artist with my students. It’s important for me to see them grow and develop their own skills while working with materials that please them in their embroidery.”

For the love of learning

Fifty-nine percent of the people who took our survey have taken classes for more than five years, and 20 percent for three to five years. The majority take classes at bead shows and shops, while some turn to local societies or guilds. Survey-takers supplied the names of more than 370 stores, shops, societies and guilds, schools, community centers, and private studios as their favorite learning venues.

Why do you take jewelry classes?

To learn or add to a technique	94%
For fun, socializing, and networking	61%
To receive hands-on help	54%
For the instructions and materials	49%
Fits your learning style	41%
Other	7%

According to our survey, most people take bead-weaving classes, followed by wirework, polymer clay, and metal clay classes. Besides basic fundamentals, most bead weavers learn peyote stitch, right-angle weave, herringbone stitch, crossweave technique, and netting. Wirework students tend to focus on wire wrapping, chain maille, and coiling. Most polymer clay students learn about mixing colors, conditioning clay,

and making canes — whereas texturing, molding, burnishing or polishing, and patinating are popular among metal clay students.

Survey-takers also told us why they like their favorite instructors. In order of importance, they listed teaching skills, technical knowledge, teaching style, experience, inspirational approach, and good instruction-writing skills as invaluable attributes for teachers.

The best teachers ...

- Love teaching
 - Organize their time, content, and presentation well
 - Provide clear, complete, and accurate instructions, illustrations, and photos
 - Include complete materials lists and sources
 - Reach out to students before the first day of class
 - Accommodate different learning curves and styles
 - Bring a variety of samples
 - Watch for and correct mistakes
 - Make demonstrations easy to see
 - Address left-handed learning
 - Explain the “why” with the “how”
 - Encourage resourcefulness
 - Know their stuff
 - Keep it simple
 - Are relaxed
 - Share their experience
 - Are kind
 - Are helpful
 - Stay on topic
 - Accentuate the positive
 - Focus on their students
 - Speak audibly and clearly
 - Engage every student
 - Practice patience
 - Listen
 - Ask questions
 - Provide complete answers
 - Encourage innovation
 - Stress safety
 - Are prepared
 - Are creative
 - Are enthusiastic
 - Are inspiring
 - Stress workmanship
 - Laugh and smile!
- Bead&Button survey fall 2009

Finding inspiration

1. Let making jewelry help you discover new cultures, history, design, and math. – D.F.
2. Dedicate time to network: Take workshops and attend bead shows. – C.R.
3. Develop your style. Look at others' work and decide what you would do instead. – D.F.
4. When designing pieces, put jewelry out of your mind. Turn to nature, art, architecture, and sculptural sources of inspiration. – M.H.
5. Watch for interesting color palettes. Peer into a floral bouquet to see the hues. – D.F.
6. Add a little metallic color to your beading. Metal may heighten the value of a piece. – D.F.
7. Soften a palette by selecting two colors and transitioning from one color to the other. – L.M.
8. Go on a color diet. Restrict the use of colors you have binged on. – C.R.
9. Take a break when a color palette isn't working. Analyze the project in sections, and play with different color combinations. – C.R.
10. Look for the "second right answer": Consider an alternative technique. – D.F.
11. Carry a notebook to jot down notes or make sketches when you're inspired. – D.F.
12. When shopping, bring comparison materials in three-hole-punched clear plastic binder pouches on a binder ring. – M.D.
13. Look for unusual components at hardware stores, scrapbooking shops, and science, electronic, and salvage sources. – M.H.
14. Divide unfinished projects into "to do," "not sure," and "not worth it" piles. Remove the "not worth it" pieces. Then create new "to do" and "not worth it" piles. Write a plan to finish the "to do" projects; dismantle the rest. – C.R.
15. Keep a journal about how you made your jewelry, its measurements, and the materials you used for reference later. – M.H.

Making jewelry

16. Make your work to last 100 years. Focus on good materials and construction. – D.F.
17. When storing or transporting tools, cover sharp ends with hard Styrofoam, cork, or rigid packing material for safety. – M.H.
18. Use clear tubing from a hardware store to lengthen or "soften" pliers' handles. – K.S.
19. To string beads, dip the ends of C-Lon or thread in clear glue and trim to a point. – K.S.
20. If pliers mar your wire, loosen your grip. Or, lightly file the outside edges of your pliers' jaws with a heavy file. – L.K.

21. Use Mighty Crimpers to tuck in the bit of wire on the end of wire wraps. Gently grasp the coil and tuck in the wire. This work-hardens the coil without marring the wire. – A.M.
22. Use an oval jump ring to hang thin-gauge components from chain. If the slit opens on the jump ring, it will be on the side of the jump ring and your piece will be more secure. – L.K.
23. To price a work, record your time. – M.H.
24. When you finish a project, create a kit for future repairs by putting extra materials in a zippered sandwich bag and labeling it. – M.D.

Stitching with beads

25. Store beads by color and size. Dedicate a drawer to red 11° seed beads, etc. – L.M.
26. Keep leftover beads from larger projects in zippered sandwich bags. The bead mixes are great for making earrings and brooches. – S.S.
27. To identify crystal colors later, string a crimp bead, your crystals, and a second crimp bead on beading wire. Make a loop, crimp the crimp beads, and tag the sample. – M.D.
28. Set a timer and stretch on the hour. – M.H.
29. Keep a variety of beading needles on hand for different bead sizes. – S.S.
30. Small, flexible English beading needles are best for 15° and micro beads. – L.M.
31. Use a short, sharp needle when working on a project with tight spaces. – M.D.
32. Dedicate an old pair of scissors to cut synthetic fishing-line thread. – S.S.
33. Wind your thread around no-tangle bobbins and take your beadwork with you. – L.M.
34. When beading on a plane, clip a book light or reading light to your tray table. – L.M.
35. Color the tip of light-colored thread with a black marker to make it easy to thread. – L.M.
36. Wax protects thread, minimizes knots, maximizes longevity, and improves tension. Microcrystalline wax is stickier, coats thread better, and lasts longer than beeswax. – L.M.
37. Excess microcrystalline wax can be removed from beadwork carefully with a warm, damp paper towel. For Fireline, if your bead finish is stable and your beadwork has no fabric or leather, run it under warm water. – L.M.
38. To clean smoke Fireline, thread it on a needle and run it through a paper towel. – M.D.
39. Use baby or demitasse spoons to pick up your beads from a soft work surface. – M.D.
40. Sand the back of a smooth cabochon before gluing for better adhesion. – S.S.
41. Set aside time to work on difficult stitches. Use 8° beads to create flat and tubular pieces, then decrease, increase, and embellish. – C.R.
42. When learning right-angle weave, use one color for the top and bottom bead and a contrasting color for the side beads. – M.D.
43. To keep thread from splitting, hold the working thread exiting the last bead to one side of the bead, out of the needle path. – C.R.
44. When weaving with crystals, pull the thread directly in line with the holes, not at an angle, to avoid cutting the thread. – M.D.
45. If your project requires a specific tension, test different threads on samples first. – C.R.
46. To increase tension, place the thread over your index finger and behind your middle finger as you stitch. – C.R.
47. To decrease tension, pull on your thread after each stitch and then let it relax as you prepare for the next stitch. – C.R.
48. Embellishing with doubled thread will make your tension tighter and more even. – L.M.
49. To center an accent bead at the end of a bead-woven tube, pick up the accent bead and three seed beads between two needles on doubled thread. Pass the needle back through the accent bead, creating a picot. Stitch into the tube, adjust the tension with both needles, and weave in the thread. – M.D.
50. To weave in a short tail, pass the eye of the needle through beads adjacent to the tail. Thread the needle and pull it through. – M.D.
51. When you only have space for one more bead as you backstitch in an even count around a cabochon, don't add a bead. Connect and snug up the stitched beads. – S.S.
52. When stitching the edges of bead embroidery, make sure your thread matches your backing material. – S.S.
53. For white or light beading foundation, use permanent markers that match your beads to fill in color between beads. – S.S.
54. If your foundation edges show after cutting out your beadwork, color them with a permanent marker before stitching over them. – S.S.

Working with wire

55. Keep sterling silver wire and jewelry in sealed bags or boxes with an anti-tarnish strip to avoid unwanted oxidation. – L.K.
56. If you're a fan of oxidation, use preoxidized wire. You can incorporate beads that might be negatively affected by oxidizing solution. – L.K.

57. If investing in a lot of sterling wire, opt for dead-soft wire. It's easier to harden wire. – L.K.

58. As you do wirework or metal stamping, stop every 10 minutes to stretch your shoulders, arms, and fingers. – L.K.

59. A high-quality tool lasts longer, is stronger, is more ergonomically sound, and has better grip in the jaws. – L.K.

60. When you need a strong grip, as for spiraling heavy-gauge wire, hold the wire between the jaws of the pliers near the joint rather than out at the tip. – L.K.

61. To preserve cutters' tips, only cut thin and soft wires at the top third of your blades. When cutting heavier gauges, cut them back on the blades, toward the plier joint. – L.K.

62. When coiling wire by hand, use a ring clamp to stabilize and hold your core wire and coiling wire. – L.K.

63. The best jig for making French ear wires is the capped barrel of a Bic pen. Grab the loop end of the wire under the pen cap and wrap the wire around the barrel. Make two at a time for matching wires. – A.M.

Working with clay

64. Incandescent lightbulbs make great forms for polymer clay and metal clay shapes, including lentil beads and bead caps. – C.F.

65. Cut cereal boxes into small squares and use for mixing paint or epoxies. – C.F.

66. Roll your metal clay on Teflon paper under a heavy-duty plastic report cover to forestall moisture loss. – C.F.

67. For quick wipes, tape paper towels on the edge of your desk near your hands. – C.F.

68. To pour carbon for base metal clay, place a fan in a window and turn it on medium, blowing out. Pour the carbon into your steel box a few inches from the fan. The dust will blow out the window and the carbon will end up in the box without your breathing it in. – C.F.

69. Wrap tape (gaffer's is best) around the nonworking end of a drill bit. The taped end gives you just enough purchase to make it perfect for drilling dry metal clay. – C.F.

70. When using commercial paste, leave the top off for evaporation and thickening. – C.F.

71. Place the nonstick surface of metal clay on a 6 x 6-in. (15 x 15 cm) 18–20-gauge copper sheet to create a consistent base and move wet clay to its drying source. Leave the clay on the copper to allow it to dry faster. – M.H.

72. Use a small pointed watercolor brush to apply slip. Keep a square-tip brush clean and use it dry or slightly dampened to clean excess slip off joints. – C.F.

73. To repair a crack in a piece of clay, wet the crack with water and wait several seconds. Then add a tiny roll of fresh clay from the package and press it into place. – C.F.

74. As an alternative to sanding bronze and copper clays, you can work very quickly with a scalpel or craft knife. – C.F.

75. To add a flame-red patina to copper clay, hold the fired copper metal in cross-lock tweezers, heat it to bright red with a torch, then plunge it into boiling water. Try this with and without fluxing with paste flux first. – C.F.

76. Include "breaker pieces" — polymer clay pieces the same thickness as your jewelry — in the same oven in which you are baking polymer clay jewelry to be fully cured. Bake according to the directions, remove a breaker piece, cool it, then try to break it. If it breaks easily, bake your pieces for another 20 minutes. When a breaker piece bends without breaking, your jewelry is cooked. – C.F.

77. Warming baked polymer slightly under a desk light makes carving smoother. – C.F.

78. If your metal clay warps, spray one side with water and allow the water to penetrate. When all evidence of water is gone, put the clay between two pieces of Teflon paper, then weight it with a book or bench block for 20 minutes or until the piece is flat and dry. – C.F.

79. To flatten warped clay, put a wet sponge in an airtight plastic container or zippered sandwich bag. Place the piece on Teflon paper inside the container. The piece will be flexible in an hour or two, and floppy in 24 hours. Briefly weight it into position, then air-dry. – C.F.

80. Epoxies are the strongest glues if you measure the two parts by eye, then mix thoroughly with a clean wood stake (don't use toothpicks) for a full minute. Wipe the wood stake clean, and use it to apply the glue to a clean surface. – C.F.

Working with metal

81. If you're having a bad metal day, walk away and come back later. – A.M.

82. On a good metal day, crank up the music and work until you fall over. – A.M.

83. Slow and steady wins the day. Rushing will leave you fixing problems. – A.M.

84. Never walk away from a lit torch. When turning off a torch, do not overtighten the knob or it may damage the seals over time. – M.H.

85. Keep flexible emery boards handy. To work efficiently and safely, use a range of grits from very coarse to extra-fine for polishing. – A.M.

86. Wet files to reduce the amount of metal dust in your work area and your lungs. – A.M.

87. Use a coarse sanding sponge to round the edges of textured metals so you don't lose any texture. – K.S.

88. Use a black rubber block to stabilize pieces for filing, burnishing, or drilling, saving your hands and fingers from cramping. – A.M.

89. A ring clamp works well for grasping and stabilizing small pieces of metal to be sawed.

You can hold your work in a variety of positions, and the leather jaws will protect it. – A.M.

90. When fusing fine silver, work under a dim, indirect light source. When you can see and capture the perfect moment of color change, you increase your fusing success rate. – A.M.

91. Drill a small hole in your anvil and use it, instead of a draw plate, to make rivets. – K.S.

92. Drill a small divot in your anvil the size of your micro screw head. You won't flatten the head while riveting the back of a piece. – K.S.

93. Use a sterling silver crimp tube as a tube rivet. – K.S.

94. When making head pins, heat the entire wire before forming a ball on the end. This allows the metal being balled to grab the warm wire, making uniform sizes easier. – A.M.

95. When forming a ball on the end of wire, put at least ½ in. (1.3 cm) of the end in the flame. The wire will become molten and start to ball up. Air-dry it and it will remain black; quench it in cold water and it will become red. – M.H.

96. When fusing smaller jump rings, use less fuel in your handheld torch for a smaller flame. You can work more slowly. – A.M.

97. Keep liver of sulfur in a sealed jar on a cup warmer for better results. – K.S.

98. Make a highly concentrated liquid form of liver of sulfur in a hydrogen peroxide bottle to get more out of your purchase. – K.S.

99. Your best heat-created patinas come during cool-down, not heat-up. – K.S.

100. Use a dehydrator to speed up blue or green patinas. – K.S.

101. When using enamels, always wear a dust mask and sift over old magazine pages that you can fold up and discard safely. – M.H. ●