Filigree Free-Form Cuff

Wire filigree is a technique that consists of making a flat wire frame and filling it with shaped wire pieces. Wire wrapping is used to secure pieces together. Other techniques, such as hammering and coils, can be incorporated as well. Note the term free-form in the title of this piece and take that to heart. Be willing to experiment by making coils, curls and bends to shape the wire, then form them to fit into the frame. Don’t try to replicate every turn of the pliers shown here—fashion your own design. This is a creative project and it is challenging.

Finished Size: approx. 6 3/4” (17.1cm) long x 2” (5.1cm) wide

materials list

16” (40.6cm) of 16 gauge round wire
46” (116.8cm) of 20 gauge round wire
Approx. 144” (365.8cm) of 26 gauge round wire
16” (40.6cm) strand of iolite chip beads
1. Follow the template on the last page to shape a 16” (40.6cm) length of 16 gauge wire; begin at the coiled end and use chain nose or flat nose pliers and your hands to shape the wire. Fasten the end of the wire with a tight loop onto the initial angular bends (see Tight Loops on page 21 in *The Art of Wire*). Hammer the frame (avoiding the ending loop) to flatten slightly (see Hammering on page 18 in *The Art of Wire*).

2. To make the central interior piece, cut 24” (61cm) of 20 gauge wire and use round nose pliers to bend the wire in half. Form the doubled wire into a curve following the template on the last page, then hammer the curve plus the next 1”–1½” (2.5cm–3.8cm) of wire after the curve. From here forward, hammer as you go and pre-flatten areas that will be twisted or coiled.

   Following the diagram on the last page, make a twist below the curve. Grasp the wires in the tips of a pair of round nose pliers below the curve. Bring the wire around the pliers by hand. Turning the pliers as needed, continue to bring the wire around until a twist has formed. If the twist ends up perpendicular to the wire, simply turn it so that it will be situated on the upper surface of the cuff. Curve the doubled wire again following the diagram, hammer the wire and make a double twist by bringing the wire around the pliers twice.

3. After the double twist, separate the wires from one another and form the ends independently. Form one wire end in a zigzag shape below the wire already formed, ending in a closed flat coil with its final round open. Refer to the diagram on the last page for guidance, or shape the wire ends in your own way.

4. Form the remaining wire end into a zigzag shape above the doubled area, ending this wire end in a closed flat coil with its final round open and facing in the opposite direction. Refer to the diagram on the last page, or shape the wire ends in your own way.
Fit the shaped piece into the frame, using tape to hold it in place, and reshape as needed so it fits with some of its edges abutting the frame.

Cut 11” (27.9cm) of 20 gauge wire; shape the center into a zigzag and the ends into flat coils following the template on the last page. Bend the piece to fit into one side of the frame. Repeat for the other side of the frame. Tape the side pieces into the frame.

Cut 36” (91.4cm) of 26 gauge wire and, beginning anywhere, wrap the outer edge of the entire cuff, including the edges of the interior pieces (see Wrapping on page 17 in The Art of Wire). Fasten on new lengths of wire as needed and remove tape as areas are wrapped.

With 24” (61cm) of 26 gauge wire, fasten onto any interior piece; I suggest working from one end of the cuff to the other. Wrap some portions of the interior, stringing on an iolite chip or two where the wire spans a gap. Add beads randomly; wrap interior parts together so that the piece becomes a solid whole, but leave some of the wire unwrapped. Add chips sparsely, otherwise your careful wire shaping will be obscured.

By hand, carefully shape the cuff to fit your wrist. Do not push against any of the chips. Then, working alongside the chips, push your fingers against the inside of the piece to dome it slightly.
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