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How to Make Gorgeous Mosaics: Modern Twists on an Ancient Technique

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**How to Make
Gorgeous Mosaics**
Modern Twists on an Ancient Technique

Heather Bungard-Janney

About the author

Heather Bungard-Janney describes herself as "a compulsive show-and-teller", who believes in encouraging students of all ages, and doing everything in her power to remove the "intimidation factor" from all areas of learning. Although not officially a teacher, she has worked as a tutor, summer school teacher's aide, and exhibit facilitator in a hands-on science museum. She has also lectured on everything from left-handed calligraphy to alternative religions.

Heather is currently a stay-home mom, hoping to make a living as a calligrapher, author, or possibly composer, given her ability to come up with things to sing to her kid at a moment's notice. A lifelong resident of Indiana, she currently lives near Purdue University with her husband and daughter.

Why should you read this booklet?

Okay, it's like this. Most of the books I've read on making mosaics have been just the teeniest bit intimidating to me. Don't get me wrong, they're great books – they've got all these great descriptions, beautiful photos, lots of projects, and on and on. But they tend to remind me of those "home cooking" shows where the chef pulls out ingredients and tools that no normal person is likely to have in their kitchen. You know what I mean? From these art books, I sometimes get this impression that I'm supposed to have all the best tools and a nice studio to make my masterpiece. But I've got to be honest – I don't have anything quite so fancy, and I'm guessing you don't either.

- I don't have safety glasses to wear while I nip my tiles to shape.
- I don't have a studio, and I don't have any room to work in the garage, or any other special place where I can keep all the dust and sharp tile bits away from my two-year-old daughter.
- I don't have special adhesives, grout, putty knives, chisels, custom-made molds, or any of that.

What I do have are a cookie sheet, some modeling clay, a roll of duct tape, and some one-gallon plastic freezer bags.

If that sounds closer to the way you like to do things, then this booklet should be right up your alley.

You see, I am someone who enjoys art as a hobby, whether it's making friendship bracelets, doing calligraphy, or even coloring alongside my daughter. I got into mosaics mainly because I thought they would look cool; I'm not someone who gets hired to do gigantic public displays or anything like that. I just happen to like mosaics, and while working on them, I've managed to figure out a few nifty shortcuts that I'd like to share with you.

The stuff I use and the tricks I've discovered let me work on my mosaic whenever I want, and to do it on my very cluttered craft/junk table. I've

been able to contain all the sharp bits of glass so the space is still safe for my kid to play in (actually, she likes to climb up beside me and "help"), and lucky for me, I've produced some work I'm really proud of.

It is my goal with this booklet to help you produce mosaics using my very simple tools, and a traditional technique that isn't taught very often. I'll go into detail about all the tools and toys I use, and all the tricks I've come up with to make my mosaics, and I promise that you won't need a pristine art studio or a pile of money to use any of them.

In order for any of my tricks to make sense, though, you're going to need to know a little about the specific mosaic technique that I use.

Techniques overview

For some reason, my first impression whenever I hear the word "mosaic" is either to think of kids' summer camp projects or to imagine giant murals and tiled floors in ancient Roman buildings. You'd think I would have a different image in my head by now, since I make mosaics and have done plenty of reading and studying on the subject, but I guess that's the power of stereotypes for you.

Likewise, if you ask most people how mosaics are made, they'll probably tell you that you take a bunch of tiles and push them into wet cement, or glue them onto a wood backing, and then let the whole thing dry. That description isn't wrong, as far as it goes, but like any stereotype, it only goes so far. This description covers just one mosaic technique, called the *direct method*. Direct method is a good technique to use to get a spontaneous, slightly uneven look to your finished piece, since you have to work relatively quickly to finish any area before the glue or the cement dries.

Then you've got the *indirect method*, where you put the pieces face down onto something sticky, and then once you've got a good-sized section finished, you pick that up, flip it over, and push it into the wet cement. When the cement is dry, you peel off the sticky to reveal the finished image. This technique gives you a lot more time to get your image the way you like it, and you don't have to worry about the cement drying (or mortar, or whatever). On the other hand, the pieces are, well, face-down. If you're as picky as I am, this can be a problem, since it means you're not *really* getting to see the image just the way you like it. You have to put everything down in a mirror image, and you're looking at the back of each tile besides.

My personal favorite

Which brings us to the *double indirect method*, my personal favorite. Like the classic indirect method, you're putting your tiles down onto a temporary sticky base – but you get to put them face-up, and you don't have to worry about getting a mirror image to look right. Then, once you

have the picture the way you like it, you cover the front with *another* temporary sticky surface, pull the whole thing off of the base, and then transfer it to your wet cement.

Admittedly, the description makes the double-indirect method sound really fussy. The how-to books I've seen typically don't teach it; usually, they describe the method briefly before moving on to teach either of the other two techniques.

But double-indirect really doesn't have to be fussy or intimidating. Currently, I am using double-indirect to make a series of mosaic stepping stones, a total of twelve that will eventually fit together to make a hearth around the edge of an outdoor fire ring. Trust me, if the technique were that complicated, I would find another way to do this project, or I wouldn't do it at all! Thanks to the little tricks I've discovered along the way, I'm able to take all the time in the world making each stepping stone at my table, inside the house (climate control! good lighting! comfortable seats!). I move out to the garage only when I'm ready to pour the concrete.

In this booklet, I will take you through my process from start to finish. I'll cover each of my tools, each material, and each step in enough detail that you should be able to turn around and make your own mosaics, and produce work you can be proud of. As it happens, I also created the designs for each of my mosaics rather than using a pattern from a book. I'll show you to do that, too – in other words, I'll show you how to express your own ideas and transform them into beautiful finished pieces any time you want.

I'm ready to get started – how about you?

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