



Jewelry maker Jan McCune at work in her home studio. KURT HOSTETLER/THE STAR PRESS

## A BEAUTIFUL JOB

Indiana Artisan Jan McCune's jewelry is a sight to behold

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MUNCIE — With the absence of brushes, paint and pencils, plus the addition of mallets, saws and a big, noisy grinding machine, it would be easy to mistake Jan McCune's art studio for a tool shop.

This place is where she makes her outstanding, artistic jewelry, though.

"It's my retirement career," said the 68-year-old artist. "It's a wonderful one, the kind where you get up in the morning and you go into your studio with your pajamas on."

This day, though, she was wearing blue jeans and a red shirt, topped by a green plastic apron, her funky red glasses protected by a pair of clear plastic goggles snugly around her eyes and short silver hair.

A native of Akron who met her husband, accountant Bill McCune, at Ohio University, she was a late arrival to the art world, majoring in elementary education and never taking an art class until she was 33 and living in



Jan McCune cuts a piece of stone in her studio. KURT HOSTETLER/THE STAR PRESS



An assortment of Jan McCune's pendants are displayed. KURT HOSTETLER/THE STAR PRESS

California. They then moved back east, where she taught Headstart in the mornings and took every art class she could enroll in at the University of West Virginia in the afternoons.

Moving to Indiana in 1991, she talked her way into the master's of

painting program at Ball State University, then taught there for a while before landing a job teaching in Marion for 13 years.

"That's really where I learned how to do jewelry," McCune said. "The woman who headed the department, she



Jan McCune shows off the texture of a piece of jewelry. KURT HOSTETLER/THE STAR PRESS

just happened to be good at it. ... As I taught it, I found I liked it better than anything I'd ever worked with before."

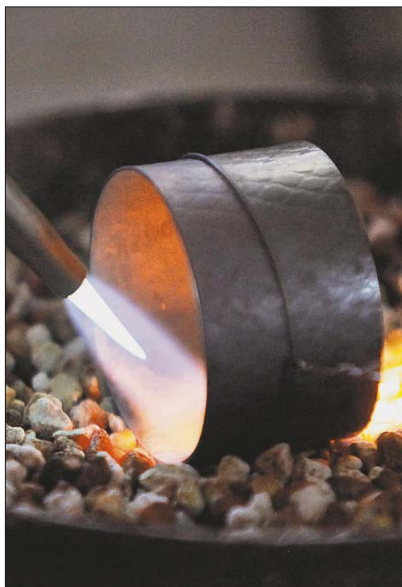
Since retiring from teaching six years ago, she has been working as a jewelry maker in her

Sun Valley Studio, the last two years under the coveted title of Indiana Artisan. Working with copper, brass and silver, she makes bracelets, earrings and pendants.

After climbing steep steps to her studio, you see a couple of

crammed work tables, a bulky lapidary machine she bought at an auction that cuts and grinds stones, and a Dremel power tool, its boxy motor suspended from a rack above, the easier to

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Jewelry maker Jan McCune solders a copper bracelet in her home studio. KURT HOSTETLER/THE STAR PRESS

## McCune

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access pieces she is working on down below. A self-admitted tomboy as a girl, she felt at home in her father's wood shop, and said she learned while teaching that it was the boys who most enjoyed making jewelry.

"You can see why guys like this," she joked as she worked with a hammer. "You hit things. You work with metal."

This morning, she flipped a wall switch that started her noisy lapidary machine, cutting through a quarter-inch slab of rhyolite, one of many stone pieces she buys in travels with Bill. Their deal is, he accompanies her to rock shops; she watches him fish.

Later, she worked on the grinder, rounding a small stone she had affixed with wax to a small length of chopstick. Then she stepped to where a round copper bracelet-to-be rested in a bed of pumice stone, some of which soon glowed fiery orange as she soldered the bracelet's inner seam with a small torch. Dipping the hot piece in water, it cooled with a steamy hissss, allowing her to begin hammering it into a bell-like curve.

Later, after sawing a small metal piece with a jeweler's saw, its blade about the thickness of string, she went on to show how she uses acid baths to put patterns in her metal jewelry.

"About everything I do has a texture to it," McCune explained, showing a visitor a few pieces' patterns. "It's from my painting, print-making background that I love texture."

If that was obvious from looking at the jewelry she was working on, so was something else. All this work involved skilled crafts-

manship.

"It's all low-tech," McCune said as she sawed. "I kind of design as I go along. It's kind of jazz-like, the way I design things. ... *Nothing* is the same. I don't want to crank it out and make 20 of something."

She tries to work a half-day in her studio for five or six days a week, then pursues another interest, like gardening. Working that steadily, how many pieces of jewelry does she create in a year?

"At least a hundred, and probably a lot more than that," she said, adding that the next thing she intends to tackle is silver casting, something she'll learn in resident training at Arrowmont School of Crafts in Gatlinburg, Tenn.

Early on, she admitted, most of her jewelry was sold to family members.

Now it's available here at Gordy Fine Art and Framing and from her website, [www.sunvalleystudio.com](http://www.sunvalleystudio.com), as well as at a gallery in Gatlinburg, plus the Fort Wayne Museum of Art. Next week, by the way, she will be the featured artist at Fort Wayne's Second Thursday event, that city's version of our own First Thursday arts walk.

"That'll be very fun," she said.

So, how successful is she?

"I make enough that it supports my (jewelry-making) habit," she said, smiling. "I enjoy the making of it, the problem-solving and just everything that goes into it. It's like an artist/engineer sort of thing."

That, she added, is all the compensation she needs.

"I don't have to get rich and famous," McCune said.

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