

Silver Dime Earrings

By Betsy Lehndorff

As a silversmith, I sometimes try to create novelty in my work. I want a piece of jewelry to give the wearer something to talk about or show off.

Pre-1964 dimes provide that opportunity. Think of them as 90 percent silver pre-cut discs, which can be turned into as many kinds of designs as you can think up. Dimes are great for earrings and bracelets, while quarters make great foundations for pendants and necklaces.



If you worry that you are defacing government property, eBay and other sources say you are safe from prosecution. Silver coins haven't been in circulation for decades, and you aren't changing the coins with fraudulent intent to pass them off as currency of greater value.

Dimes do vary. Some will reticulate under high heat. Some won't. So keep a couple extra on hand.

Materials List

- Two dimes before 1964. Some coin shops sell them as scrap.
- Two sterling silver earring posts and ear nuts
- Hard, medium and easy wire solder thinned with a brass hammer
- Two matching round cabochons, 5 to 6 mm
- 2 inches of 2mm, 28-gauge fine silver bezel wire

Tool List – safety glasses and magnification visor

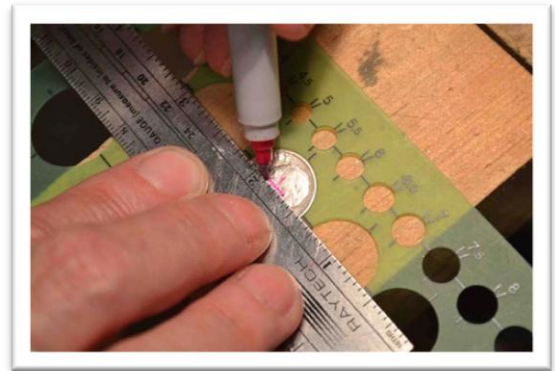
- Circle template
- Red, fine-tip permanent marker
- Straight edge
- Center punch
- Flex-Shaft or Dremel
- Drill bits, 3.5 mm bur & lube
- Dapping block and daps
- Mallet or brass hammer
- Calipers
- Buff wheels
- Safety glasses
- Half-round file
- Flush cutter
- WUBBERS Bail Making Pliers 3.0, 5.0 mm
- Triangular needle file
- Nail salon sanding sticks – 120/240 and finer. Check beauty supply stores
- Torch and soldering set up
- Fireproof soldering tweezers
- Jewelers saw and 2/0 blade
- Hallmark or maker's mark stamp
- Magnification visor

Mark Centers of Dimes

Step 1

Use the circle template, a ruler and a fine-tipped marking pen to identify the center of each dime. Working North to South and East to West, align the ruler slightly below the template marks and draw an X in the middle of the dime. Mark the center of the X with a center punch. Put some lube on a small drill bit and drill through the coin. This mark makes it easy to center your cabochon stone later.

Hallmark the back with your own stamp.



Dome the Dimes

Step 2

At your soldering station, anneal the dimes until they are a pale orange color. Quench. Put on safety glasses, and place the dime in bottom of a doming block. Set the block on a tree stump or other solid surface and hit end of the dap with mallet several times.

Repeat with the next smaller dap, until the dome is the shape you want.



Measure Your Stones

Step 3

Use a caliper to measure both cabochons. These amethysts are 5.09 mm.



Make Two Bezels

Step 4

Anneal the 2 mm bezel wire by gently heating it with a torch until it begins to turn pale orange. This makes it easier to wrap around small stones.

File the end of your bezel wire flat, at a 90 degree angle. Then wrap the wire around a mandrel that is the same size or slightly larger than your stone.



The Wubbers Bail Making Wubbers 3.0, 5.0 mm pliers make this task easy. Just be sure to make the bail *slightly* larger than the stone.

Trim to fit with flush cutters and file second end of the bezel wire flush, so that both ends meet without any gaps.

Check fit, and press the seam gently with Wubbers pliers to flatten the silver for a good join.

Solder the Bezels

Step 5

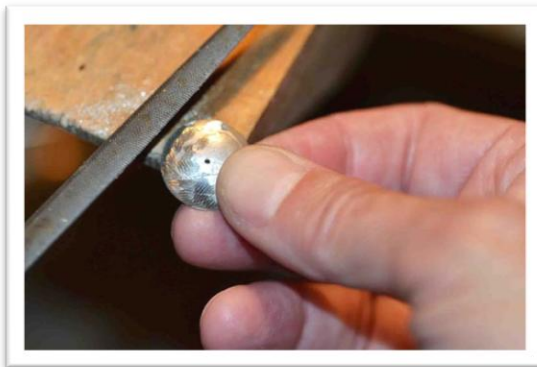
Use a brass hammer and steel block to pound an inch of hard solder wire into a thin strip. Cut into tiny snippets. Flux the bezels, place solder on seam and heat with torch until it flows. To avoid melting the tiny bezels, wave the flame back and forth.



Texture the Dimes

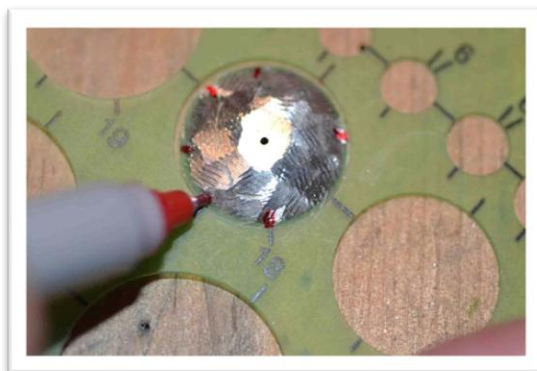
Step 6

For this project, use a file to remove the raised surface of the dime, leaving it rough. Then file a flat area around the hole, where the bezel will be soldered.



In later projects, you can leave the coin's original surface intact, or remove it and sand the surface with 220, 400, 600, 800 and finer grades, finishing it to a high polish. Use flexible salon nail files from a beauty supply.

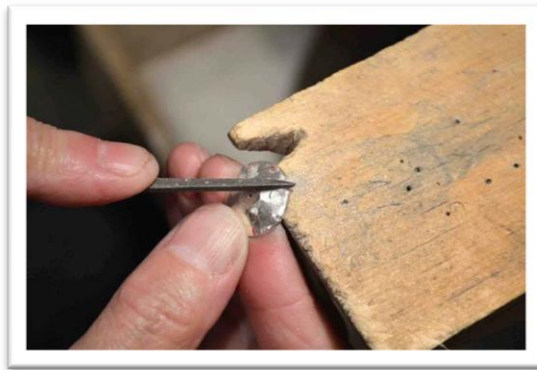
For a variation, this dime was marked in eighths.



Use a jeweler's saw to cut 1/8 inch in toward the center.



Widen the saw cuts with a triangular needle file, shaping dime into eight petals.



Cut the Ajours

Step 7

Wearing safety glasses, use a succession of larger drill bits and burs up to a 3.5 mm to open up the hole so light can come through once the stone is set. Use plenty of lube and pause if dime gets too hot. Make sure the hole is smaller than the bezel, leaving a shoulder of at least 1 mm all the way around for the cabochon to sit on. Clean.



Solder the Bezels Onto the Dimes

Step 8

Flux the bezel and the dime. Place two tiny snips of hard solder on the flattened area, stack the bezel on top and heat with torch, waving the flame around the edge of the dime to avoid melting the bezel. Pickle, rinse and smooth with file if necessary. Keep a solder pick and a couple snips of solder handy.



Solder Posts Onto Earring Backs

Step 9

Dig a round hole into your soldering block, so the bezel can fit into when the earring is face down. Flux the back of the dime and earring post. Cut a small snip of easy solder and melt it onto the end of the earring post. Then, clamping the post in the fireproof soldering tweezers, position it so it is resting, hands free, on the back of the dime. Heat dime until solder flows.

Pickle. Rinse. Clean and polish setting.



Set Stones

Step 10

Pickle. Rinse and clean the setting.

Drill a hole in your bench pin for the earring post to fit, so the dime is flush and easy to hold.

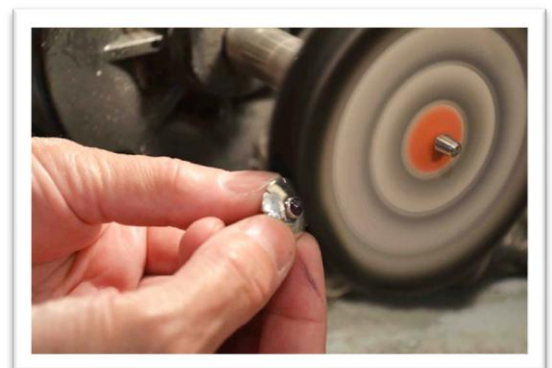
Check the fit of the cabochon in its setting and file down bezel if it is too high. Snap the stone in and bend the bezel in with burnisher.



Final Polish

Step 11

Give the earrings a final polish, add ear nuts and enjoy



Review Questions

- 1) What kind of dimes can I use?
 - a) New dimes
 - b) Collector dimes
 - c) Scrap dimes minted before 1964
 - d) It's illegal to deface coins

- 2) How much silver does a pre-1964 dime contain?
 - a) 50 percent
 - b) 10 percent
 - c) 90 percent
 - d) 100 percent

- 3) The best way to solder a bezel to a dime is?
 - a) Aim the torch flame directly at the bezel.
 - b) Wave the flame around the edges of the dime until the solder melts.
 - c) Heat from underneath on soldering rack.
 - d) Both b and c.
 - e) Fuse in a kiln

- 4) How do I drill a hole through the center of a dime?
 - a) Use a circle template to draw a line north to south and east to west
 - b) Use a center punch to start a hole
 - c) Drill with a Flex Shaft and a drill bit
 - d) Use a succession of larger bits and burs to enlarge the hole
 - e) All of the above

- 5) What other ways can you use coins in jewelry?
 - a) Link them together for a bracelet
 - b) Bezel set them as a ring
 - c) Create a pendant
 - d) Solder a row of them together for a barrette
 - e) All of the above