

EVOLVING CONTRASTS

Annie Koenig's juxtapositions create a harmonizing design

BY REBECCA OSTER BACH

Annie Koenig of Annie K Jewelry in Louisville, Kentucky, designed her necklace Surrender—which recently won second place in the gold/platinum category of the 2014 Saul Bell Awards—with contrasts in mind. “I like pushing the envelope on the design while still maintaining a very wearable, functional piece,” she says.

The resulting design is full of shapes and textures that play off each other: distinctly shaped 18k bi-metal graduated links made of both high-polish white gold and textured yellow gold, with each link containing both an Akoya pearl and a black freshwater cultured pearl. The bi-metal centerpiece contains 133 round brilliant-cut diamonds, topped off with a South Sea Tahitian pearl in the center. The piece is meant to mirror the rugged, rough exterior of an oyster shell, surrendering the smooth, round pearl within.

Koenig's first step was to take her ideas to the computer, where she began playing with shapes in CAD. While she originally envisioned the links as one piece, forming the designs in CAD made her realize the importance of contrasting two elements in one link: white gold and yellow gold, texture and high polish.

She then cast the necklace in brass and silver to work out all the kinks before using 18k gold. “You don't really know how it will look until you cast, and it was great to do a test build because then I knew exactly how I needed to fit everything,” she says. For example, this process helped Koenig decide on an appropriate gradation of the links. Front to back, the links graduate down in size about 70 percent. However, while she could easily scale back the size of the link, she still had to find the right level of texture for the smaller links, as her original texture had become too fine.

“I wanted to keep the size of the texture the same, as the links graduated in size,” she explains. “So whether the link was small or large, the texture would look the same.” Her solution was to scale the links down in a series of five sizes. Although the texture was originally built into the piece in CAD, she removed it from the resized models and reapplied it in a different size, one optimized for the size of the link. “I had to check and tweak the size of the texture and sometimes apply it a couple times to get the right size,” says Koenig.

She then printed final models of the

separate metal components for the links and the centerpiece. Because of concern she had about the finishes on the links, she opted to do a bi-metal casting. “It would have been difficult to get the [high polish] finish on the white gold right next to the texture of the yellow gold without polishing [the texture] away,” she says. Since white gold has a higher melting temperature, she cast the white gold components first. After applying a high polish finish to the white gold pieces, she fit them tightly against the models for the yellow gold pieces, allowing the molten yellow gold to cast right up against the polished white gold.

For the addition of the pearls and diamonds, she tested numerous sizes on the sample casting to identify the best choice for each link. Koenig also went through numerous layouts before settling on the current positioning of the diamonds. “You always have to test in real life what you visualize on the computer,” she says.

While Koenig's name for the piece, Surrender, evokes the story of the oyster surrendering its pearl, she explains that the name was also about the process. “In the end,” she says, “it was only when I surrendered to the mindset of the piece that it all came together.”

Annie Koenig of Annie K Jewelry in Louisville, Kentucky, spent more than seven months creating her 18k bi-metal necklace, Surrender. The piece recently won second place in the gold/platinum category of the 2014 Saul Bell Awards.

Wanting a unique clasp that would be functional and allow the necklace to lay correctly, Koenig researched a variety of clasp styles. She wound up designing a hybrid between a box clasp, pearl clasp, and a foldover clasp with a safety latch, which she chose because "it was very secure and easy to use," she says.

To connect the finished links, she inserted the end of a white gold link through a hole in the next link. The end of the link was designed as a post, allowing Koenig to attach a black pearl and secure the links. This helped ensure movement within the piece, which Koenig found necessary to keep the necklace comfortable to wear.

For the addition of the pearls and diamonds, Koenig tested numerous sizes on the sample casting to identify the best choice on each link gradation. Each link features an Akoya pearl ranging in size from 9.5 to 7 mm, as well as a black freshwater cultured pearl measuring from 5 to 4 mm. The center South Sea Tahitian pearl, at 13.5 mm, is larger as it is meant to mirror the oyster in the shell. She also went through numerous layouts before settling on the current positioning of the 133 brilliant-cut diamonds, which range in size from 0.02 to 0.04 ct.

Front to back, the links graduate down in size about 70 percent. While Koenig could easily scale back the size of the link in CAD, she still had to find the right level of texture for the smaller links, as her original texture had become too fine. Her solution was to scale the links down in a series of five sizes. She removed the original texture from each link, and then reapplied it in a different size, one optimized for the size of the link. "I had to check and tweak the size of the texture and sometimes apply it a couple times to get the right size," she says.

After developing an initial design in CAD, Koenig used a 3-D printer to create models of different thicknesses and textures, and chose the options that were most striking. "I take a concept and see how it looks many different ways," she says. "Each version layers on each other, and I end up putting the best things together." ♦

