

excerpt from the *Jeweler's Bench Book*  
by Charles Lewton-Brain  
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## Michael David Sturlin

*Scottsdale, Arizona*

Michael David Sturlin likes to keep tools and parts segregated into trays and boxes, relying heavily on cigar boxes, metal trays, and other handy containers. "Everything has its place," he says. "You can spend a lot of time looking for tools—five minutes to find the right bur or five minutes to locate the right file. Those five-minute increments of lost time quickly add up." Among the advantages to this system is the ability to see exactly what the tray contains. "By using this system of trays for different applications, I can readily switch from one activity to another with a modicum of movement, and without having to disrupt my whole workspace," he says.

To the right of Sturlin's bench are a safe (1) as well as a fold-out countertop (2), which he

uses for layout and staging. Before he starts working, Sturlin pulls the metal and gemstones from the safe and uses the table to lay out designs, sketch, weigh items, or take measurements. "Since I'm often working on multiple projects simultaneously, I can view all the pieces at once while keeping the components separate," he says. He also uses the counter area to record time spent on various tasks in a notebook; a wall clock (3) is positioned directly above the counter. The notebooks and his reference books are stored on a corner shelf (4), which he can access conveniently without getting up from his bench.

Sturlin stores his works-in-progress as well as finished pieces in wooden trays (5) with padded liners; they stack easily and slide into the bottom shelf of his safe. He uses cigar boxes (6) to store gemstones and precious metals.



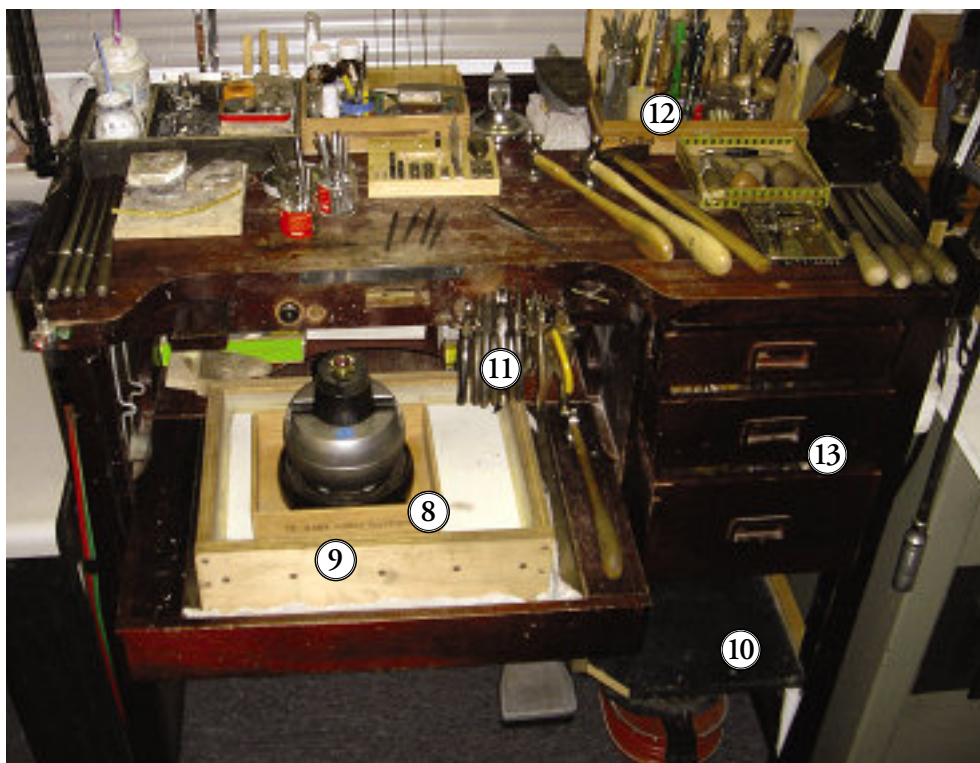


The metals are kept in Altoids tins (7) and separated by karat and color.

Sturlin uses a flat-front bench with a pull-out drawer; it provides several working heights. When he's setting stones, he removes the bench pin and reaches for his engraving ball, which sits on a wooden tray (8) with cutouts for his fingers; he can lift it up and place it into a wooden

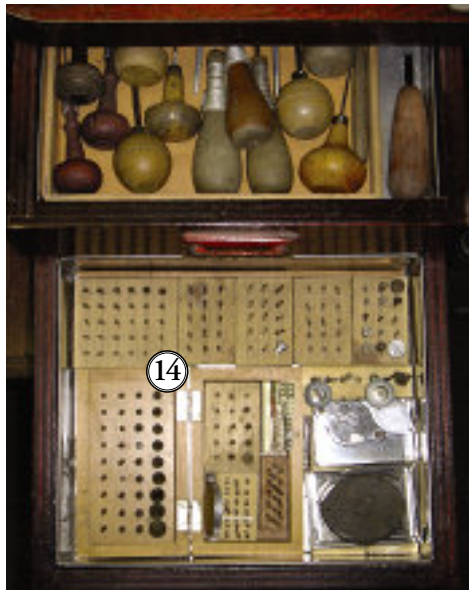
box (9) on his bench drawer. If he's drilling holes in metal to set stones, the metal shavings land in the box, not in the tray, which makes for easier cleanup. This setup not only stabilizes the bench drawer so that it doesn't bounce or give, but also brings the engraving ball up to the appropriate height for stone setting applications. An open shelf has been added under the bottom drawer of the bench (10) to permit rapid access and storage of the ball, along with attachments and chasing hammers.

All of the tools on the bench are close at hand, with the pliers (11) arranged by order of use. (Sturlin made the pliers rack out of an old clothes hanger and screwed it against the face of his bench. It's conveniently located near his right hand for easy access.) He keeps files, setting tools, and punches in glass containers on the top of his bench (12), separated by function.



When needed, the jar is brought out and placed in the center of the bench, the tools used and returned, and the jar restored to its place when the task is finished. “I find this storage system more efficient than keeping the tools lying down in the drawer, where you have to dig through to find the right one,” he says.

To maximize space in the three side drawers of his bench (13), Sturlin had metal trays made to fit inside the drawers to divide them into two sections. Within each section, assorted wooden boxes and trays further divide the area. This keeps the tools from sliding around and potentially getting damaged when the drawers are opened and closed.



He’s arranged wooden blocks containing different shapes and sizes of burs so they fit perfectly into the bench drawers (14). If he takes out a block, there is an empty space in the drawer that begs him to return the block to its rightful position once he’s done using the tools. Overall, Sturlin’s bench is a very well-organized system; the trays-and-tool-block approach is well used.

He keeps all of his soldering equipment—tweezers, third hands, flux, solder snips, etc.—in a box on the top left corner of the bench. Since soldering can be a messy operation, he’s made compartments in the box to prevent any of the items from tipping over (15).

On the rare occasion when he finishes a piece and it doesn’t need to go in the mail that day, he



keeps it on a neckform in his studio so that he can look at it in its finished form. It gives him the opportunity to enjoy a piece before he sends it off to a gallery.

