



## Kate Wolf

Wolf Designs  
Portland, Maine  
Jeweler, educator, wax carver

**Y**ou wouldn't expect wax carver extraordinaire Kate Wolf to have any ordinary ole' bench, would ya? Known industry-wide for her recently released gold and silver Wolf Wax and Wolf's Precision Wax Carvers, this jeweler/inventor has customized her workspace down to the bench itself, which com-

prises a large butcher block that rests on steel cabinets she purchased from Graingers. These are pricey if purchased new (around \$640), but you can find them for a bargain at flea markets and auctions.

"You don't need a jeweler's bench to make jewelry," she says. "What's important is to have a stable work surface at the proper height, as well as good storage. I see all tools and work areas as a good beginning, then think about how to customize and improve them."

Some would frown on the fact that Wolf uses her bench for both wax carving and metal work because of the potential for cross-contamination. If it weren't for her impeccable neatness, she'd agree. Everything on Wolf's bench is organized for efficiency. The tools used most are in arm's reach, and everything has its place on the bench.

**1. ERGONOMICS.** I suffered for years with TMJ and chronic neck and shoulder pain. A friend of mine who is an ergonomics expert came to my shop one day and saw the way I was sitting at the bench. She told me that my poor bench setup was damaging my body: My bench pin and chair were too low. I was working all hunched over and curled up, straining my muscles, depriving my lungs of oxygen, compressing my vertebrae...the list goes on. I got a better chair and raised up my bench pin, and within a week and a half I was pain-free and no longer needed a chiropractor.

When it comes to ergonomics, the first rule of thumb is to make sure you have a good chair at the proper height. Your feet should be flat on the floor and



at a 90° angle to your calves, your calves 90° to your thighs, and your thighs 90° to your back. Get someone to look at you from the side to assess and correct your position. Once you have your chair set to the right height, you can use the GRS adjustable bracket to move your bench pin to whatever height you need. I do most of my work with the bench pin 1 inch below my collar bone.

**2. BENCH.** I used 2 x 4s to raise the butcher block up above the steel cabinets. This created two storage cubbies on the left and right sides of my chair. The left side is the dirty cubby, where I keep my sanding supplies. (This side also gets hit with dirt flying off my flex-shaft.) The right side is the clean cubby, which houses some of my wax carving tools.

**3. UNDER THE BENCHTOP.** What's under the bench is just as important as what's on top. I installed a fluorescent light beneath the benchtop to illuminate the pan, so I can locate dropped items quickly and clean the pan out thoroughly between tasks. On the wall to the left of the light I keep my spring gauges, solder snips, millimeter gauge, the wrench for my engraver's ball, sharpening stones, and square close at hand.

**4. WAX PEN.** For a wax carver, a wax pen is an essential bench tool that needs to be easily accessible, but it can take up valuable bench space. To spare some prime benchtop real estate, I designed a pivoting shelf for the wax pen. Using L-brackets, a piece of wood, and a simple trunk hinge, I created a pivoting shelf attached to the bottom of the benchtop. I pull it down to use it and then tuck it away when I'm done.

**5. CORD CONTROL.** When you have so many tools and lamps in one place,

cord control is key. I like to use plastic-coated cup hooks that easily screw into the bench to keep my cords tangle-free and out of the way. I also use the hooks to hold the flex-shaft, quick-change hand-piece, chuck key, and more. If you look closely, you'll spot about nine of these on the bench.

**6. BUR CADDY.** This prototype is the next offering in the WolfTools line: a bur caddy/benchtop organizer that holds hundreds of burs, among other tools. It sits on a Lazy Susan at eye level, so you just spin it around to find the tool you need. This organizer has enabled me to consolidate half of the stuff on my bench into a small footprint. In addition, it helps me focus. Working at an uncluttered bench gives me the visual repose I need to focus on the task at hand.

**7. GRS ADJUSTABLE HEIGHT BRACKET.** I put two plates on my GRS adjustable height bracket for the two bench pin positions I use most. I use the top plate for sawing and filing, and the bottom plate for layout work or other tasks where I need to look down on the work.

**8. TWO FLEX-SHAFTS.** When it comes to flex-shafts, two is definitely better than one. I keep one on the Foredom drill press for milling wax and drilling, and the other one is loose for the rest of my flex-shaft work. At first I was hesitant about spending money on a tool I already owned, but it paid for itself in a few months in terms of time savings.

**9. FILES.** I keep the files I use most in a vintage Jello box. The others are in a drawer.

**10. TV MONITOR.** I use my TV monitor for teaching purposes only. Some jewelers with geezer eyes think they can work

off the monitor, but you can't; you need to use a microscope or other magnification. I have the camera on an Acrobat stand, so I can switch it with the microscope when I'm doing detail work.

**11. PLANTS.** Plants, especially spider plants, help to naturally filter the air in the studio.

