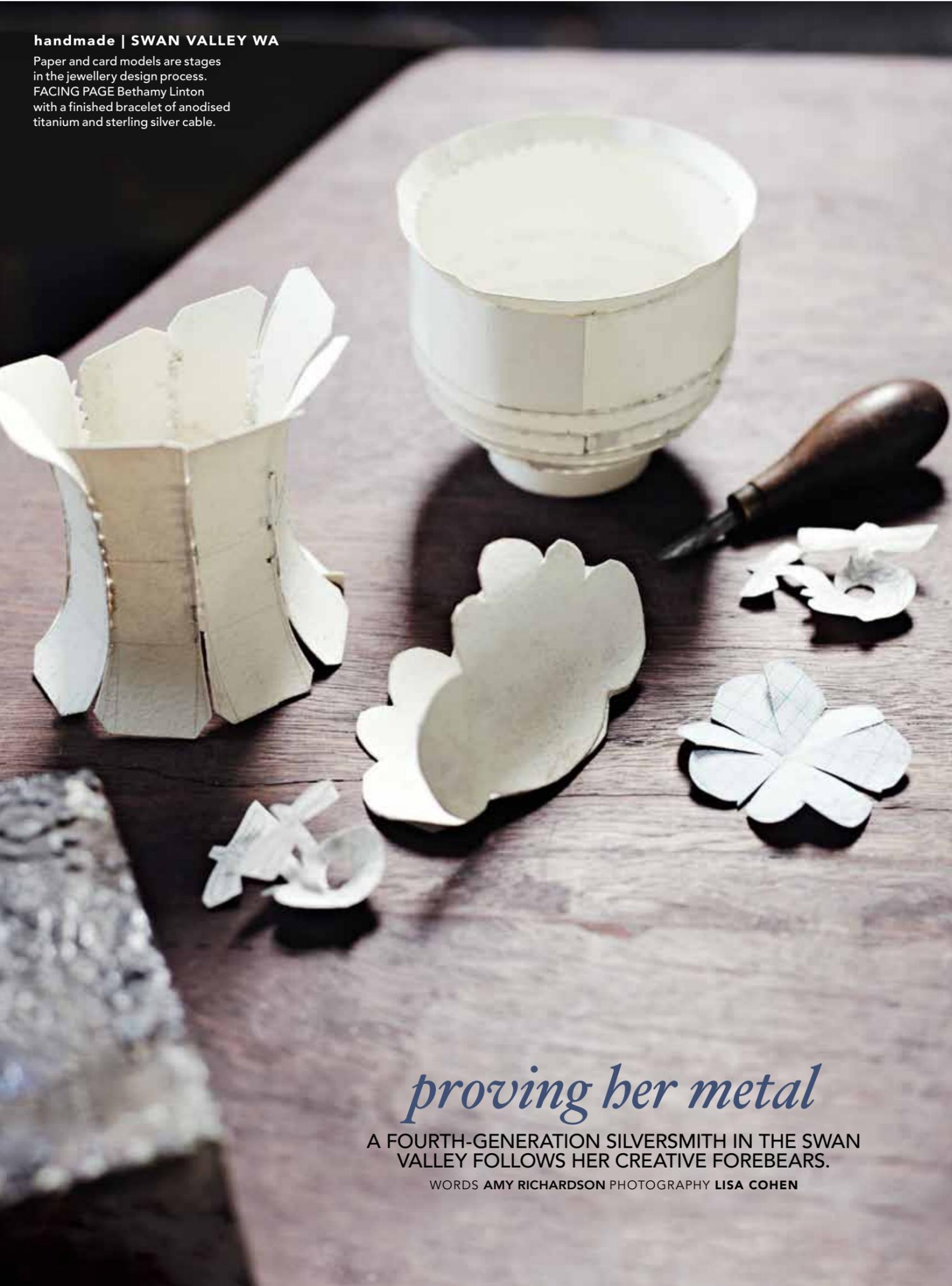


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Paper and card models are stages in the jewellery design process. FACING PAGE Bethamy Linton with a finished bracelet of anodised titanium and sterling silver cable.



proving her metal

A FOURTH-GENERATION SILVERSMITH IN THE SWAN VALLEY FOLLOWS HER CREATIVE FOREBEARS.

WORDS AMY RICHARDSON PHOTOGRAPHY LISA COHEN



IN THE SWAN VALLEY studio of silversmith Bethamy Linton, the three generations of artistic ancestors that preceded her are not just a legacy, they're a physical presence. As she bends over her workbench, painstakingly plying, sawing and riveting metals to create her intricate jewellery, she's watched over by wooden busts of her great-grandfather, grandfather, father and uncle.

"My grandfather made them," Bethamy, 37, says. She points to a bust of a handsome man with a florid moustache. "That's my great-grandfather — he was renowned for his furniture, silversmithing and painting, and there's a big collection of his work in galleries around Australia."

James Walter Robert Linton formed the Linton Workshop with jeweller Arthur Cross in 1908. The successful business passed to his son Jamie, who was followed in turn into silversmithing by his son, Bethamy's father John. Linton Silver cutlery and tableware pieces can be found in the collections of most state galleries and Queen Elizabeth was presented with a set of silver teacups made by the firm when she visited Perth in the 1980s.

Her mother, Lina Linton, is also an established artist, and with such a creative family Bethamy had to find her own footing. "It's a very beautiful thing, that kind of history, but it took me a long time to be confident in myself, or at least come to terms with all that stuff and be able to pursue my own work," she says.

Bethamy trained with her father from the age of 16, and went on to become an apprentice at Kailis Australian Pearls and work closely with jewellery designer David Cruickshank. Finally, seven years ago, she struck out on her own.

For this self-described "city girl", a move 18 months ago to a six-hectare former ostrich farm near Gidgegannup, north-east of Perth, has meant some changes. Adapting

to the relative isolation and challenges of country life, such as no municipal water supply, has "been a bit of a shock" to Bethamy and her partner, Craig Reid.

"But we've got some animals now — some goats, sheep, chickens and quails — and we've come to know the wildflower season, which is incredible."

Each morning, Bethamy travels the 20-minute drive down Toodyay Road to the studio she rents in the grounds of Taylors Art and Coffee House. She'll often spend days on end sketching the designs for a new piece, or painstakingly cutting out or embossing pieces that she'll later assemble.

"If I'm doing a big piece, I really need to be completely immersed in it, as the process isn't necessarily comfortable for me," Bethamy says. "It really requires my deep concentration so it's got to be a seven days a week thing."

Unlike many other artists who see commission work as an artistic compromise, Bethamy relishes the challenge of meeting someone's expectations. "Commission work for me is fantastic. You're responding to other people's ideas, so you do things you wouldn't normally do in your own practice, so it's a lovely way to learn. And there can be a beautiful communion if it works well.

"Jewellery is so often a gift and it's given with such positive personal emotions; often people are getting married or engaged. So you get to be involved in really lovely aspects of someone's life."

This fourth-generation silversmith has come to terms with her lineage and her future. "I've landed in this bizarre position, where this is my life now and it's great," Bethamy says, with a laugh. "I feel incredibly fortunate. I work a lot, but I'm in charge of my own time and I get a lot of energy out of it. It's who I am." And her family couldn't be prouder. *



CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE A print on the studio wall behind a necklace and tools; Bethamy with an ever-growing collection of prints found at op shops — "I have a hoarding problem... I also have a fascination with birds!"; spoons designed by earlier Lintons "and the bird thing again, I'm afraid..."; tools of the trade; Bethamy at work. FACING PAGE Found objects displayed with a collar and ring from the solo exhibitions that Bethamy held in Perth and Sydney last year.

