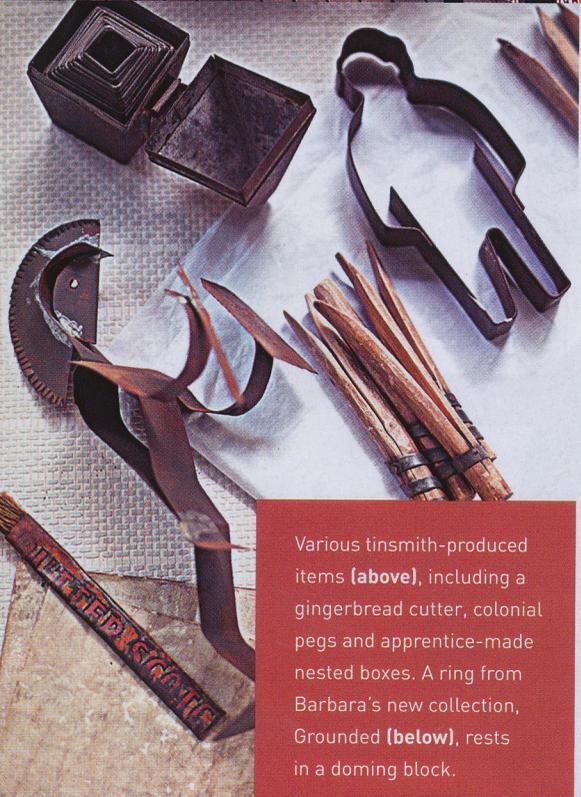
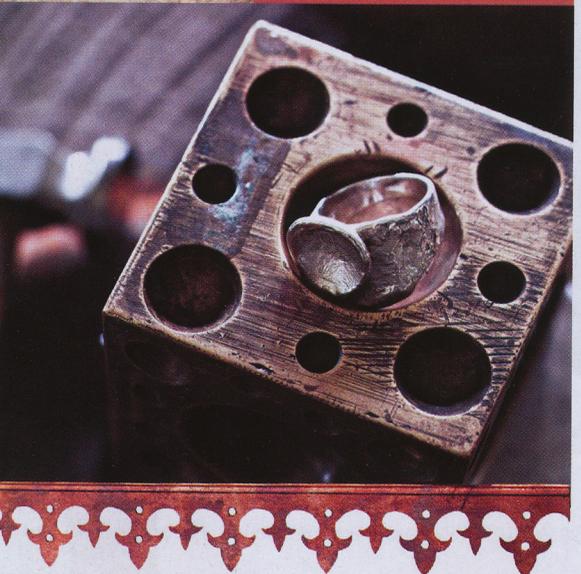




(Left) An old sign on Barbara's verandah is a family hand-me-down. **(Above)** Her tools include planishing hammers and doming blocks. **(Right)** Copper elements, a hand-forged necklet and a bracelet by Barbara.



Various tinsmith-produced items **(above)**, including a gingerbread cutter, colonial pegs and apprentice-made nested boxes. A ring from Barbara's new collection, **Grounded (below)**, rests in a doming block.



Not long ago, Barbara Heath noticed something new in her tin-and-timber Queensland. It surprised her that she'd not seen it before, having lived and worked in the inner-Brisbane home for a couple of decades. Before stepping onto the front verandah, she looked up and saw in the ornate tinwork at the end of the guttering (the 'acroteria', she tells me) a decorative cut-out of a bird.

For this remarkable artist, jeweller and sculptor, the discovery was also a pleasing coincidence, as she was at the time busily preparing for her exhibition. Currently on at Fortitude Valley's Artisan gallery, 'Tinsmith' explores local architectural details created by the type of worker the show is named after.

"It's amazing how much a local craftsperson or tinsmith had an effect on how a building looked," says Barbara. "It's a bit like Chinese whispers ... it's lovely to think that the vernacular elements were so influenced by the local makers and the knowledge and skills passed on from one to the other as they travelled through towns." Despite their considerable skills, tinkers, as they were known, were a distrusted bunch of journeymen, whose smooth-talking salesmanship was viewed with the suspicion associated with roving gypsy populations.

Barbara, however, is no itinerant, having maintained the same base for more than 30 years. Clients come to her for one-off pieces that commemorate life's important occasions and people. Her practice, Jeweller To The Lost, has its bread and butter in commissioned work for clients who share in her passion for beauty and its historical, mythical and metaphysical associations.

Her catalogue of works is gorgeous and richly layered with meaning. Much of it is inspired by the ever-growing collection of her husband, Malcolm Enright (a self-described "urban archaeologist"), which inhabits every nook and cranny of their house (and much of the floor and wall space). The collection runs the gamut from ancient artefacts to voodoo icons. Barbara and Malcolm's second shop and home, a Georgian mansion in Tasmania, which is being painstakingly restored by the couple, is also revealing a significant hoard of treasure.

The ability to drill into layers of history and draw on personal meanings has been a mark of Barbara's practice. "So much of my work," she says, "is about getting to know a person." The undercroft studio where this creative activity takes place is a busy hive overlooking a lush subtropical garden.

Long-time colleague and master jeweller, Juan-Luis Gonzalez, makes up the third part of the trio she refers to as a "three-pronged fork". Having worked with him for 23 years, Barbara says, "We know exactly how the other thinks in a making environment. We share a whole history of material technique that is unspoken."

Recently, after an intense period in the studio, creating an intricate engagement ring, she and Juan-Luis enjoyed "just hammering out something big" in the form of some unique works for the 'Tinsmith' show. "I love the simple, geometric forms of old tin pieces," says Barbara, "and the connection to a whole history of hand-making." ❖
'Tinsmith: An Ordinary Romance' is on until November 13 at Artisan, 381 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley, www.artisan.org.au.