



Esther Winter at Keno Hill.



Esther Winter working in her Mayo studio.



Metals, Meanings, and the Jewellery of Esther Winter

MAYO'S ESTHER WINTER designs and fabricates jewellery made from four metals found in the Yukon: gold, silver, copper, and tin. She's been at it full-time since 2001, and in 2013, she sold more than 3,000 earrings, bracelets, and necklaces online, at craft fairs, and through trade shows that have put her into seventy stores in Canada and the United States.

In four of her collections, 41 symbols are hand-stamped onto different metal shapes. Winter's interpretations of the aurora borealis, caribou, moose, and the perennially popular snowflake have positioned her in the retail world as a northern artist. Winter says she simply chose the symbols because she was inspired by her environment—the Yukon. Winter writes a story about the emblem on each piece she creates, saying the symbols and the tale they tell are an important part of the jewellery.

Recently, Winter opened up about the symbolic attributes of the materials she works with and her passion for metal.

GOLD

Wealth, prosperity, purity, and authority

"Interestingly, men buy my gold pieces. Women rarely buy the more expensive jewellery for themselves," Winter observes.

Winter works with gold nuggets from Owl Creek, which drains into Mayo Lake. She tries to acquire flattish nuggets so she can apply a symbol. On one 3.7-gram nugget, she fit two curious children standing near an inuksuk. "No one else puts symbols on gold nuggets," Winter says proudly. "It's extremely unique."

SILVER

Vision, clarity, awareness, focus, persistence, and subtle strength

Winter's first collection, Winterchild Silver Jewellery Line, was crafted from silver, her metal of choice. "I like working with silver, and I understand its qualities. I can put symbols into it [and] shape and curve it. It's not too soft, and it holds its shape well in earrings and necklaces," Winter says.

"I think it's neat that I live on the Silver Mining Trail, in an area with a silver-mining history, and that I work with silver," she adds.

COPPER

Charisma, feminine beauty, artistic creativity, affection, and balance

"The Sunset collection is by far the showiest thing I've made," Winter says of her newest line. "It is made mostly of copper, has a mirror finish, and is very shiny."

"People really like copper. It's amazing how it goes with everything," Winter observes. "When women try it on, I see them rethinking how jewellery works and realizing that anything could go with it."

TIN

Meditation, balance, and a philosophical view of life

The tin Winter uses is from a dismantled log cabin that once stood on her property. "Some of the logs were being reused, but I was thinking about the tin roof that had been made out of flattened gas cans from the 1920s," Winter recalls. "I was on a long drive and I was thinking, *I should make something out of that*," she continues, "and I started to think about jewellery."

When Winter had the metal assayed to make sure it was safe to be worn, she discovered the bulk of the gasoline cans were made of tin and iron. "In fact, it's quite hard to work with," she expresses. "It's kind of brittle." She cut pieces, sanded them, and applied a coating to "bring out the warm, rich colours." Next, she hammered in copper with a ball-peen hammer to give the piece a rippled-water effect.

After several months of trial and error, Winter's Old Tin Roof Line was born and almost an instant hit, especially with those people who love the creator's philosophy that nothing should be thrown out.

Winter hopes for the day when she can add more territorial content to her products by buying sheets of Yukon metal rather than purchasing sheets from mixed-mine sources sold by smelters abroad. In the meantime, she's still market testing—literally. She's been known to take a booth at the Stewart Valley Farmer's Market and have people try on items and give her feedback. You might be one of the people Winter surveys about which symbol, shape, and metal should go into her next metal creation.



The tin roof that inspired Winter's popular Old Tin Roof collection.



Ear rings from the Old Tin Roof collection.