

What Clay to Use and When?

With so many types of clay it can get pretty confusing as to what clay to use and when. Hopefully this file will clear up the confusion.

What Steel to Use and When

Steel on Its Own

If you are just starting your experience with base metal clay, I would suggest using Low Shrinkage Steel XT. It is friendly and easy to use. Most of the projects that are introduced in my first book: *The Handbook of Metal Clay: Textures and Forms* (2nd edition), originally written for silver, can be easily done with Low Shrinkage Steel XT.



Steel Combined with Other Metals

1. *Mokume Gane Patterns*

Any of the steels works well with these patterns *if it is used in small amounts*.



2. *Gradients*

All steels work well with gradient surfaces. **Only Pearl Grey Steel (not XT) works with gradient from steel to White Bronze!**



3. *All Other Designs*

Low-shrinkage Steel *XT* is recommended.

If you use it in combination with Quick fire bronze, you will have to fire the steel part first at its high temperature, then add bronze and re-fire at a lower temperature.



If you use it in combination with Quick-fire Bronze *XT*, you can fire them together once, at high temperature.



What Bronze to Use and When

Bronze on Its Own

I suggest Quick-fire bronze, since it can be fired at a lower temperature while reaching its maximum shrinkage and strength.



Bronze with Copper

If you are a beginner but want to explore mixed metals, I suggest starting with Quick-fire copper and Quick-fire bronze (not XT). You will find lots of projects in my book: *Mixed Metal Jewelry from Metal Clay*. Many of the projects in *The Handbook of Metal Clay* are “translated” in the second edition to a combination of Quick-fire copper and bronze.



Bronze with Steel or with Copper and Steel

This is the same as “Steel combined with other Metals” above, with one difference:

In mokume gane patterns, if you use Quick-fire bronze and fire at a low temperature, the color of steel will be black (right earring below). If you use Bronze *XT* and fire at high temperature the color of steel will be blue (left earring below).



It's a matter of choice: if you like sharp contrast, use quick-fire bronze and steel (in small amounts) and fire at a low temperature. If you like subtle contrast, use Bronze *XT* and steel (you can use big amounts) and fire at a higher temperature.

A file called “[Introduction to Mixed Metal Clay](#)” is now available on my blog. It expands on the firing temperatures when combining different metals.