

Worldly Goods

A SOURCEBOOK TO THE UNIQUE AND EXTRAORDINARY



Virginia engraver Gail Smith at work

SILVER METTLE

The centuries-old art of hand engraving hasn't lost its luster.

ON THE SIXTH FLOOR OF THE TIFFANY & CO. New York headquarters, 73-year-old engraver Carlos Colonna works in a small, spare office just big enough for two people. His specialty is heraldry—the art of engraving family crests or coat of arms on silver and gold—and his rare books on the subject, such as *Armorial général* and *Irish Families*, are so old and thumbed through that they are held together with duct tape. Next to the viselike engraver's block, where Colonna secures rings and other jewelry, are his wood-handled gravers: sharp steel tools for carving intricate designs. They rest in a pile on a raised desk that Colonna stands next to for hours; standing while engraving, he says, helps ease his back pain. It is a modest

office for a craftsman who has engraved silver and gold for the likes of Jacqueline Kennedy and President Lyndon Johnson.

A native of Argentina, Colonna, a periodic employee of Tiffany's since 1956, practices the highest form of engraving. It is a singular skill mastered only after a lengthy apprenticeship and many years of experience (each of Colonna's two apprentices have been in letter engraving for ten years). On this particular day, Colonna, impeccably dressed in a blue pinstriped suit, blue monogrammed dress shirt, and a red tie, is working on a gold ring. He places a quintuple-magnifying jewelers' loupe over his right eye, picks up one of his gravers, and, with the steady hand of a neurosurgeon, makes a delicate cut. "This one is quite a challenge," he says, incising a microscopic star