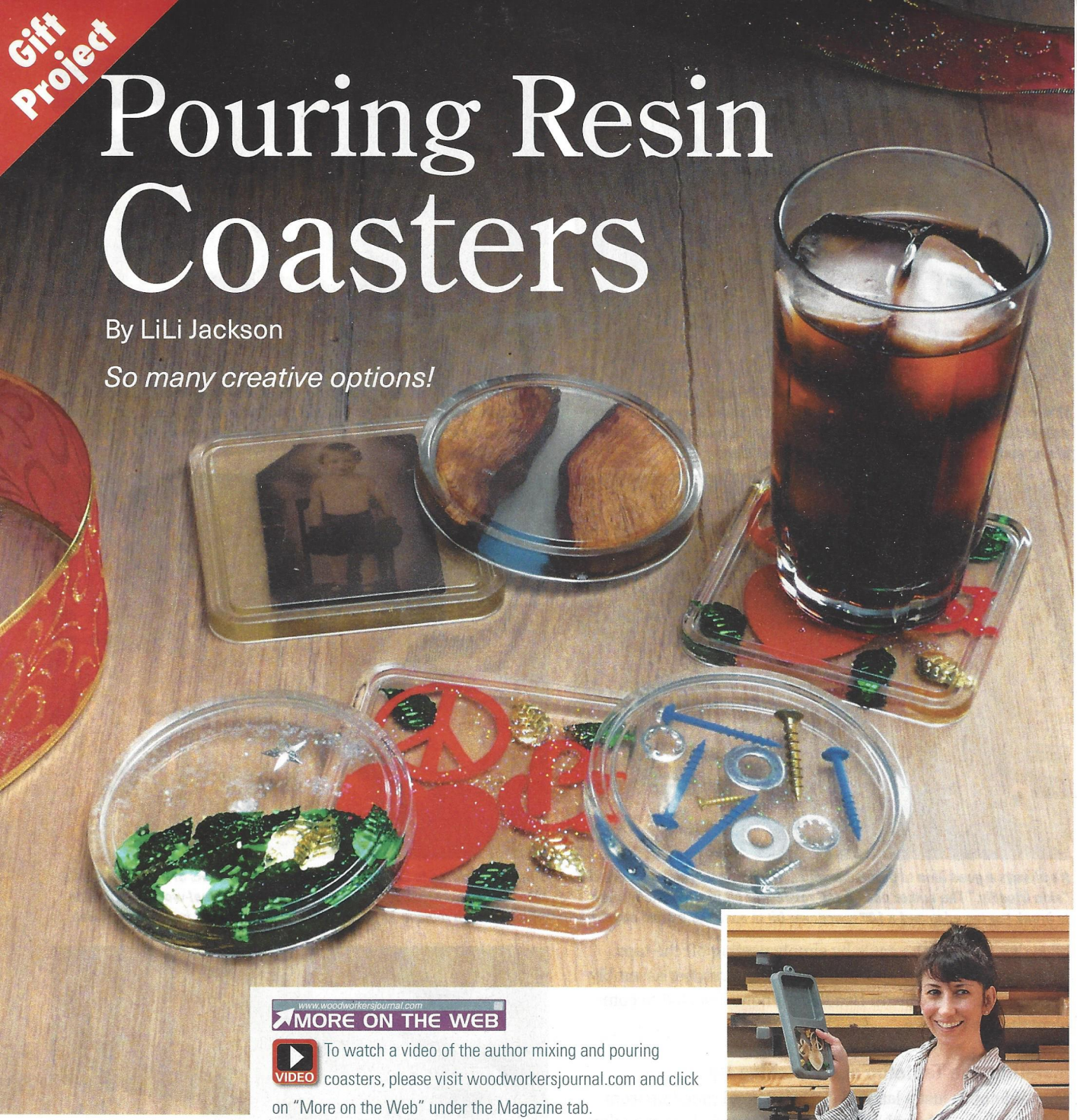
Gift Project

Pouring Resin Coasters

By LiLi Jackson

So many creative options!



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VIDEO To watch a video of the author mixing and pouring coasters, please visit woodworkersjournal.com and click on "More on the Web" under the Magazine tab.

Handmade gifts never go out of style, and they're a fun way to explore your own creativity. Lately I've been excited to make some epoxy coasters using Rockler's cool new silicone coaster molds (for more about the molds, see "Tool Preview," page 60). These coasters are not hard to make, do not require special tools and present so many opportunities for customization!

I've been experimenting with the molds for awhile and have come up with a number of ideas to share with you. My first attempt was making a mini "coaster" version of the epoxy waterfall tables we've featured in past articles. This is a great starting point for beginners, testing out adding colorants to the epoxy and using tiny offcuts of wood you might also have around your shop.

I've also explored some other ideas using different materials and methods. Some of my favorites were a photo of my grandpa and "woodworkers' coasters" using screws and washers ... plus, of course, various holiday themes.

Prepping for Pouring

Make sure your work area is set up for measuring, mixing and pouring epoxy that will stick to nearly everything, such as your workbench and clothing. I recommend using a silicone mat or plastic sheeting to protect work surfaces. And if you're working in a kitchen or small workspace, covering the floor with plastic sheeting or a painting drop cloth is

Prepping and Pouring Basics

The author prepares her workspace to get started making resin coasters. She recommends Alumilite Amazing Clear Cast Epoxy in the 16 oz kit (Rockler item 65911; $21.99). It cures very clear and accepts color well.

Spraying Rockler's silicone molds with a mold release isn't imperative, but it will help make the coasters easier to pop out when they cure hard. It will also help to protect the molds over time.

For this set of coasters, the author poured a thin layer of resin into the molds, deep enough to fill the lower lip.

Bubbles can form in the newly poured resin. They're easy to remove, either with a quick pass of a torch or by misting with isopropyl alcohol.

also a good idea. Drop cloths from a big box store are cheap, and you can reuse them. They'll protect against spills and make cleanup easy.

When using these gray silicone molds, mold release is not required, but I highly recommend it for prolonging the life of your mold. Mold release is a spray that allows cured epoxy castings to pop out of the mold more easily (see the top right photo on this page).

Open Time and Mixing

Epoxies have different cure times. The epoxy I'm using here cures in about 30 to 40 minutes at 70°F. Larger pours and warmer room temperatures will shorten your working time.

This epoxy's mix ratio is 1:1 by volume. Using a graduated mixing container, measure out equal parts. If the ratio is off even a little bit, you could end up with tacky, uncured surfaces.

Make sure to mix thoroughly; keep the stir stick in contact with the bottom of the cup to reduce air bubbles in your resin. Mix for approximately 3 to 5 minutes. Make sure to scrape the sides and bottom of the mixing cup, and continue to stir until no swirls are visible. Once the fluid is clear, mix it for an additional two minutes. Because of the differences in viscosity between the two parts, mixing does take some time.

Customize with Embedded Bling or a Special Photo

Shiny metallic baubles (above) or even a family photo (bottom left) are two options you can embed in epoxy. The objects should be clean and dry.

Gently tilt the mold if needed to spread and level the liquid resin, and be aware that the epoxy will begin to harden quickly. Don't dally!

Pouring, Layering and Embedding

At this point you could introduce a pigment or mica powder to the resin. When you're ready to pour, do it down the side of the mold to avoid making air bubbles.

Allow the resin to cure for 18 to 24 hours. Heat and mass will dictate the amount of cure time required; the more mass, the faster it will cure. And the warmer the room temperature the faster the cure. Thin areas take longer to cure.

I found that to create interesting layers, a good technique is to pour just enough epoxy to fill in the lip of the coaster. After the first layer cures, it's a perfect time to add objects and pour another layer. This layer could be of a different color.

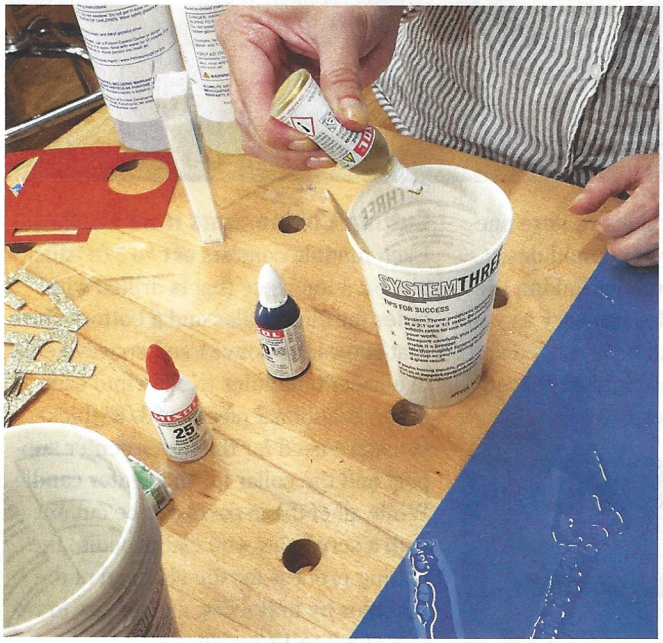
If bubbles form in the uncured resin, wait about 10 minutes, then lightly heat the surface with a torch and watch them disappear — it works like magic!

Cleaning Up Liquid Resin

To clean up drips or spills on hard surfaces, use rubbing alcohol (even hand sanitizer works) on a clean rag, wiping

A clean stir stick from a coffee shop or a tongue depressor can help you arrange the embedded objects however you like in the liquid resin.

A mix of brightly colored tiny decorations and glitter create a whimsical Christmas-inspired coaster set.



A variety of colorants can help to create dynamic pours, too. Be sure to mix the colorant thoroughly into the resin to achieve an even tint.

Mica powder (above) can add sparkle to a coaster. Once the resin cures, buff it to a glossy finish with Novus #2 Fine Scratch Remover (Rockler item 58280; $8.99).

up the epoxy immediately. Once cured, epoxy resin is nearly impossible to remove, but it sure makes a great coaster!

Check out my "More on the Web" video at *woodworkersjournal.com* to learn more. Here's wishing you a creative and happy holiday season!

LiLi Jackson is a frequent contributor to Woodworker's Journal.