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Crafts & Hobbies

The New Mosaics: 40 Projects to Make With Glass Metal Paper Beans Buttons Felt Found Objects & More

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Picassiette (Ital)? the “crazy plate smasher”— was the moniker locals gave to foundry worker Raymond Isadore when he began affixing broken cup fragments, seashells and stones to every inch of his Chartres, France home in 1938. Thirty years later, the completed home became a temple of modern mosaic art. It’s a totem—along with the whimsical, surreal work of Spanish architect Anotonio Gaudi—of the rebirth of mosaics in this century.

The New Mosaics introduces readers to the eccentric art of inlaid patterns and teaches them to become crazy plate smashers. No need, however, to grout the entire house. This book contains forty small-scale projects with step-by-step instructions on transforming everyday objects with tessarae, small hard materials such as metal, pebbles, glass, clay and broken crockery called pique assiette.

This photo-filled book also enlists less traditional mosaic ingredients like paper, felt and buttons. There’s a wealth of playful and imaginative materials: elegant broken eggshell on a tabletop, sumptuous red velvet squares on a journal cover. Readers learn to use bottle caps for a pop-art wall hanging, tacks and tiny hardware for a folksy “Welcome Home” sign, children’s blocks and dice for a checkerboard game table.

Most projects are simple enough for beginners and can be made with materials on hand or found easily at local stores. More complex mosaicsinclude patterns. The forty projects focus on household or garden itemsranging from birdbaths and vases to mirror frames and faux stained-glass windows.

Short takes throughout The New Mosaics provide glimpses of artists and into some of the history of mosaics. Memory jugs, for instance, were created by early African-Americans to honor the deceased, borrowing from the Congo ritual of decorating graves with items belonging to the dead. Victorian hobbyists later picked up this tradition of attaching small items—buttons,

coins, sewing scissors, china, toys—to vessels.

In the book's final chapter, an inspiring gallery of mosaics by renowned experts shows how crazy plate smashing in the twentieth century has become high art.

Lori Hall Steele