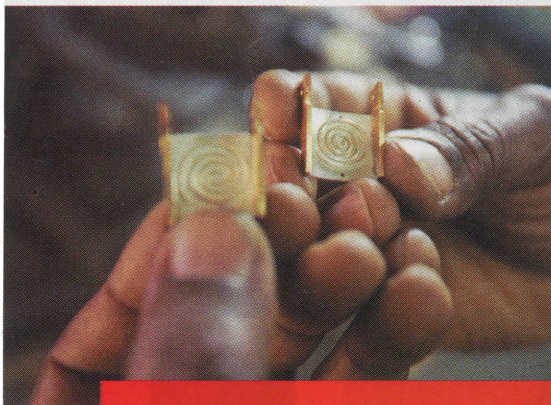
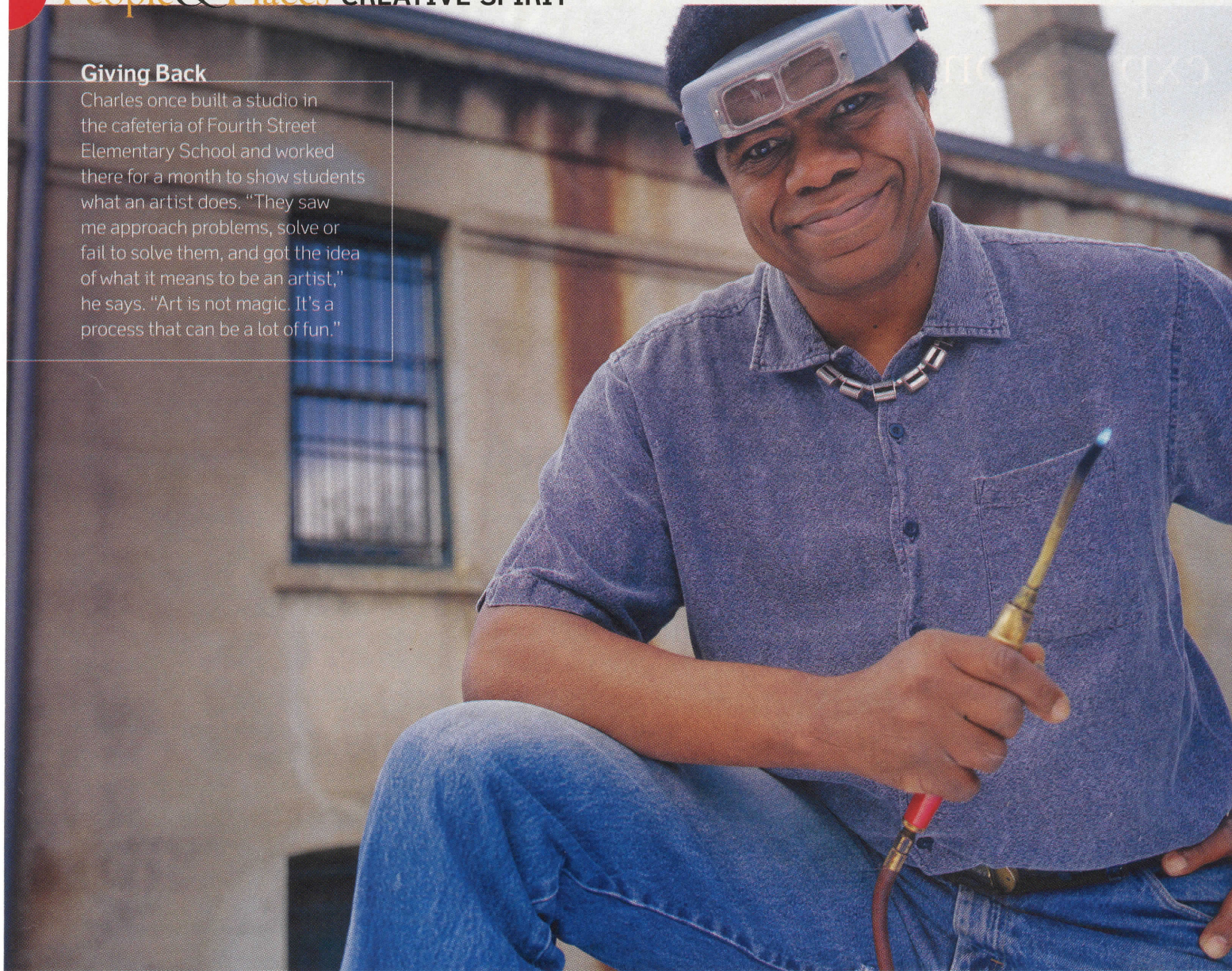


### Giving Back

Charles once built a studio in the cafeteria of Fourth Street Elementary School and worked there for a month to show students what an artist does. "They saw me approach problems, solve or fail to solve them, and got the idea of what it means to be an artist," he says. "Art is not magic. It's a process that can be a lot of fun."



Charles Pinckney has a keen eye for turning personal stories into treasured keepsake jewelry. ABOVE: In his hands, these pieces will become part of a new pendant titled *Whirlpool*.

## Made of Memories

Inspired by childhood memories—his and others'—an Athens artist bends life's special moments into wearable sculpture. By **Jennifer Dienst**

**W**atch out when Charles Pinckney laughs. His deep, warm baritone, a low vibration rolling past a big grin, penetrates every corner of his cluttered Athens studio in the Old Clarke County Jail. Even a mere chuckle might grow into a full-scale guffaw that lasts several minutes.

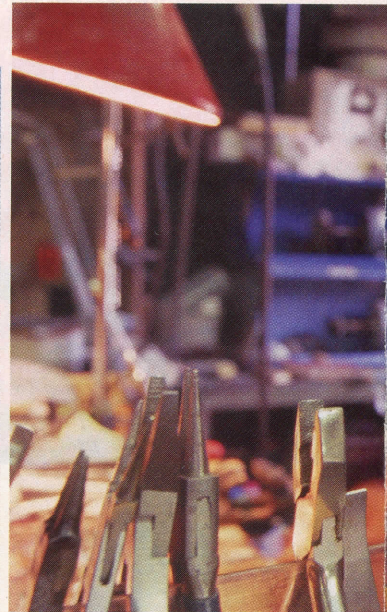
When this metal artist speaks about his jewelry, though, expect a thoughtful conversation that personifies his elegant designs. Each earring, necklace, brooch, pendant, and bracelet contains a story he itches to share. "I create what I call 'wearable sculpture,'" Charles says, "and the best pieces conjure up great memories." [turn to page 34](#)





**“If you look at my work, and it’s just a pretty thing, I haven’t done what I set out to do. But when there’s a sense of connection, a real dialogue, that’s success.”**

CHARLES PINCKNEY



**Twisting Memories Into Earrings**

With names such as *Pickin’ Berries* and *In The Garden*, much of Charles’s jewelry reflects his 1950s upbringing in rural Williston, South Carolina. “I had a great childhood, and I am just spreading that joy around,” he says.

*Faces in the Window*, a swinging earring made of copper, titanium, and sterling silver, evokes the eager young faces of Charles and his five siblings waiting for their father to arrive home from work. “We knew what corner he would come around, so we’d sit in the window, watching for his foot to appear,” Charles says fondly of the ritual. “When we saw him, we’d tear out the back door and down the dirt road, kicking up dust, to carry his lunchbox and walk home with him.”

**Piercing, Fusing, Forging** Bent over a workbench and clutching pliers, a drill, or a welding torch, Charles could pass for a mad scientist. He peers through thick,

visor-mounted goggles at bits of metal, some hefty, some mere specks. Tools lie strewn on the floor and tables, the most useful within easy reach. Gems, beads, and other baubles glitter among a general coating of metallic dust.

The Georgia Museum of Art, where Charles has served as a docent, has commissioned him for 10 years to design its annual Smitty Award for laudable volunteers.

**More Than Mere Baubles**

Charles doesn’t work only with metal and gems. He shapes emotions and memories too. Some customers commission pieces without even seeing a sketch. Instead they relate a personal moment to him and trust him to recast it in what he creates.

“If you look at my work, and it’s just a pretty thing, I haven’t done what I set out to do,” he says. “But when there’s a sense of connection, a real dialogue, that’s success.”

Client Kathy Reed entrusted him with a cherished pearl (hers from a relationship that didn’t work out) and asked him to design a piece around it. He mounted the pearl between two close but unmoving silver trees in a stunning pendant. “I love his work because he is so insightful, so spiritually tuned,” Kathy says. “If anyone could figure

out what to do with my pearl, he could. When you buy something from Charles, you begin a lifelong relationship with him.”

**Tell Us More** Traveling to art shows, Charles often imparts more than just jewelry. “I’ll tell someone the story behind a piece, and then she’ll recount a related experience from her life,” Charles says. “People who resonate with the thought behind a work are my favorite kind of customers. They really connect with the art.”

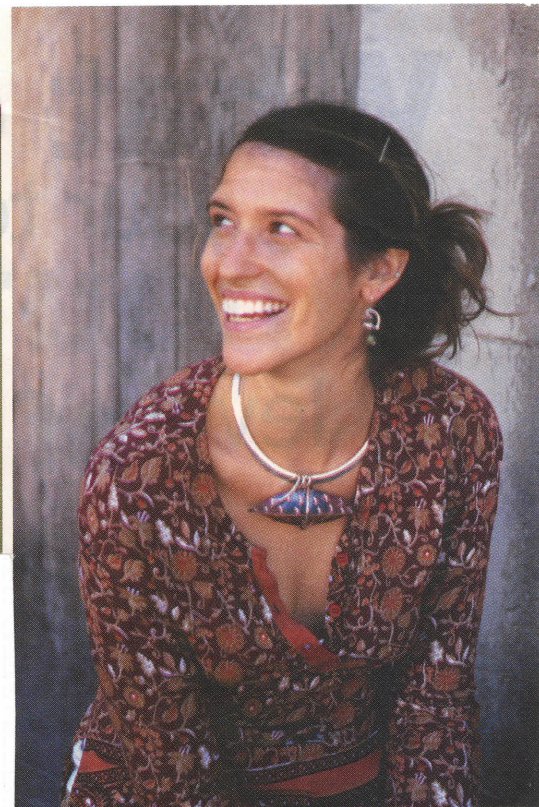
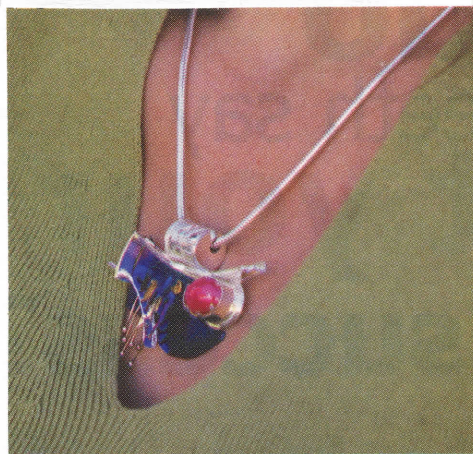
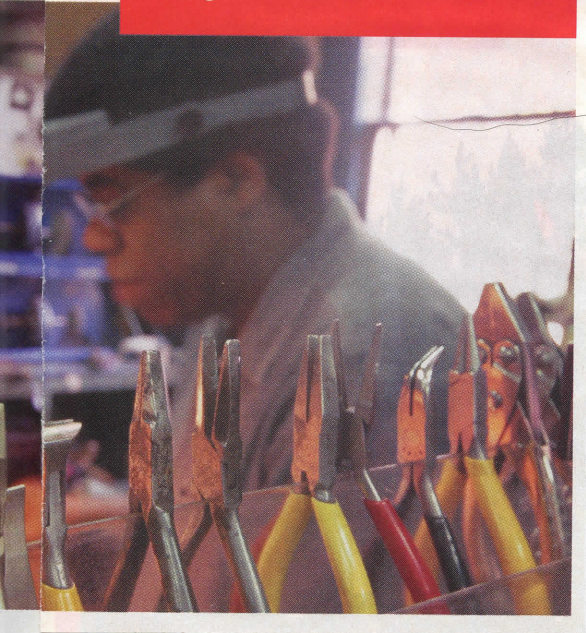
A former Clemson University psychol-

ogy major, who applied his epic voice for 25 years as a radio deejay, Charles discovered his passion for metalwork after taking some basic smithy courses. “I have always liked to tinker, and I just fell in love with metal,” he says. “It’s so buttery, so yielding, and yet there’s also a resistance.” Psych studies and taking calls from listeners informed his habit of analyzing the sentiments behind the personal objects that he crafts into jewelry.

“It’s all about creating something from dialogue and stories,” he says. “As much as anything, I create from those kinds of emotions.” ●



Surrounded by tools and raw materials, Charles concentrates on turning metal and gems into wearable sculpture. BELOW, LEFT: The 1876 Old Clarke County Jail in Athens serves as his studio, while a 1966 Volkswagen Microbus named Josie gets him to art shows.



Sophia Szombachy models a *Pod* pendant made of forged copper with fused sterling silver chips and a sterling bail with *Offering* earrings of sterling and copper. ABOVE, LEFT: A Charles Pinckney *Homecoming* pendant consists of sterling silver, titanium, 14-karat gold, bronze, and a star ruby in a custom bezel.



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