

Designs in Silver

Carla Jennings talks about her trade as a jewellery designer



Jewellery designer, Carla Jennings lives and works in Cornwall and has been designing and making contemporary silver jewellery for the past three years. "Growing up in Cornwall has been a big influence on my work and as I am sure everyone agrees, Cornwall has the most amazing artistic vibe. I was also brought up in an artistic home and from a very young age was drawn to art and design, but have been especially excited by jewellery design for the last 12 years or more. The idea of creating a piece of wearable artwork fascinates me," she says.

Carla first started making beaded jewellery as a hobby, then began to sell pieces in the small gift shop that she ran in Camborne. "My beaded jewellery was very basic but I really enjoyed playing with colour, and the fact that I was making a bit of money from it was an added bonus."

Over time though Carla wanted to expand her creativity, so she taught herself silver wire-wrapping. "I loved the way silver wire could be used to create twists, folds and swirls of movement. Using this material fired my imagination and I thought the results were very different from what was already available."

It wasn't long before Carla wanted to learn the basics of silversmithing and so attended the art school in Penzance, which gave her an interesting kick-start to her career as a jeweller.

"The classes were fun and the whole course was a fascinating challenge to me. I immediately started to develop my own style, incorporating wire-wrapping techniques into my designs. I knew

that if I was to succeed as a jewellery-maker though, my designs needed to be innovative and as unique as possible. With a lot of perseverance, patience and a whole pile of doodles, I set to work building up a range of designs. The process from design to finished piece is always so exciting," she adds.

"My designs are mainly inspired by my immediate environment – organic shapes that you can find in the most unexpected places – anything from seaweed to cutlery. I still use sterling silver wire as the base of my designs and having always been attracted to organic materials, I also really enjoy setting gemstones into my jewellery. I love to use stones to add a splash of colour, or to actually take a single stone and design a piece of jewellery that especially enhances the natural beauty of the gem. My main aim is to create unusual beautiful shapes; simple, contemporary and elegant jewellery. Although I feel it's important to keep up with the latest trends in colours and styles to some degree, I tend to make it a priority to create jewellery that you will want to wear time and again."

Carla is used to working from home but has recently moved into a studio in Hayle where she also sells her jewellery range. "Having a studio has enabled me to concentrate more fully on my craft. There are always new techniques that I'm keen to try and new equipment to play with, which makes the job so interesting; every day is a learning process."

Aside from her ever-increasing range of designs, Carla has also undertaken many commissions over the years, including

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specialised brooches for various organisations and wedding commissions. "I love that people can now pop into my studio with ideas for a piece of bespoke jewellery. I especially enjoy the challenge of a commission, it often gives me a chance to create something completely different to my usual style. I feel it's important, in this age of mass-production, to offer my customers a personal service where they can discuss exactly what they would like." Carla continues: "My policy has always been to produce pieces that are completely handcrafted from start to finish. I take pride in the fact that the links, findings, ear-wires and other units are individually crafted from scratch. So, even though I do repeat designs, they vary slightly every time."

Carla sells her silver jewellery in various prestigious galleries and outlets throughout Cornwall and shows her work at various events such as the Royal Cornwall Show and the Hidden Art Design Fair at Godolphin House. "These craft and design events give me an opportunity to meet the public and receive feedback on my work. I like to know what draws people to my designs and feel it's very important and beneficial to really listen to my customers. Feedback means I can tailor my designs and even develop new styles."

Such events are also a great chance for Carla to meet like-minded craftspeople. "One of the biggest challenges of working for myself, I find, is the need to remain invigorated, but I can often find a wealth of inspiration in other creative people."

Having joined forces with another jeweller over a year ago, Carla now arranges jewellery parties which are hosted in private homes and at fundraising events.

"Jewellery parties are a fun opportunity for women to get together with their friends, have a glass of wine or two and try on as much jewellery as they like. The host also has a chance to receive some free jewellery of their choice as commission. I've teamed up with Lucy Kemp who uses textured precious metal clay with hints of gold and semi-precious stones. Our styles differ but complement each other, and displaying our jewellery together in this way provides a wide variety of choice." □

Carla Jennings Jewellery,
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