

ART/history:

A retrospective exhibit on the career of jewelry designer Jude Sharp

The wondrous world of Jude Sharp – a photo exhibit on the creative process

Finishing, setting and assembling

Jude's workbenches show the old world patina of many years of turning out thousands of pieces of jewelry. One is for work in wax to create the models for casting some of the pieces or components of jewelry. One is for metal work, which Jude uses for cutting, soldering, and adding engraved, incised or textured elements to the piece. Different types of tools line the benches for different types of processes or work.

In the center, another bench holds some equipment, such as a pneumatic, or air, hammer and the associated air compressor, and an engraver's block. Another bench holds a piece of equipment for polishing, with the entire wall above it displaying different gradients of polishing wheels from Tripoli (coarse) to Rouge (fine). Most pieces will go through many levels of polishing to get a beautiful, almost mirror finish.

"It's tedious, actually," Jude says referring to the finishing process. "You go from the coarsest grit, to another, to another, until the finest grit." She quotes a jeweler friend who she says sums it up very well, "tedium is our medium." And you get a sense after spending time with Jude that her calm, friendly and steady demeanor is well suited for the patience needed in this work.

Precious or semi-precious stones, if part of the design, are acquired and prepared, setting(s) created, and the stone(s) set into the finished piece. Sometimes a customer will bring in stones they want to use, or sometimes they bring in another piece of jewelry that they want stones removed from and re-used in the new piece. In other cases, Jude purchases stones to use in the piece. When the piece is completed, it is photographed and added to Jude's portfolio of work and then presented to the customer.

Jude does not show many signs of slowing down in her nearly 50 year successful career. She seems to relish each assignment to exercise her creative mind in new directions. That's good news for the people of central Pennsylvania who seek her out to make jewelry creations that commemorate important milestones in their lives, or just express their personalities to the world.

Pendant

In this piece, the customer "panned" in a muddy stream in North Carolina and found a ruby that she wanted to form the centerpiece of a pendant. The customer found a piece in Jude's portfolio that was similar to what she wanted, so Jude made sketches and notes on a photograph of that piece to come up with a new custom design. Jude sent the ruby out to be cut and then made a wax model of the setting for the ruby and sent it to the casting factory that created a rubber mold of the model and cast the setting in 14 karat rose gold. Jude then filed and polished the casting and set the ruby. She also made some additional components of the pendant using white gold "findings," which are pieces of metal that can be cut and shaped into various parts and components of a piece of jewelry. Jude also acquired and set a diamond into the piece.

Ring

In this piece, the customer brought in a photograph from a newspaper ad for a ring similar to what the customer was looking for, with a desire to accommodate some stones that she provided. Jude did a sketch for a design similar to the photograph and then created a wax model. The model no longer exists because the casting was done using the lost wax method. Jude did the setting and soldering in of the stones and the piece was completed.

Photos by John Powl, Under The Bridge Productions

