

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

Stepping behind the gate near the back of Jude Sharp's lovely jewelry store on North Queen Street in downtown Lancaster is like entering a different world entirely. It is a place that exudes old world craftsmanship with countless numbers of unusual looking tools and equipment lining the walls and well-worn workbenches. Further toward the back of her workshop, Jude's beautiful dog, Quincy, keeps a keen eye on the activity. It's a wondrous place that few customers ever get to see.

"Tell me what you want to do today," Jude says as she works on finishing a new custom designed brooch for a customer. "Otherwise, I'll just keep on working here."

I explain that I have come to her store and workshop with photographer John Powl to try to capture in photos and words the essence of the creative process that Jude uses, and has used over her nearly 50 year career in designing and creating unique jewelry for men and women. Although not possible to capture everything that could possibly come up in her work in crafting custom jewelry, I hope to convey some insight into the special skills and craftsmanship it takes to do what she does.

The Design Idea

The first step in the process of creating a piece of custom jewelry is meeting with the customer to learn about what they are looking for and what they like. Sometimes, the customer has a very definite idea of what they want, either bringing in a photograph or drawing of a piece they have seen elsewhere that they like, or picking something out of the online portfolio of photographs of the thousands of pieces Jude has done in her career. In some cases, a customer will select several pieces of which they like certain aspects, and ask Jude to come up with a design that melds together what they consider the best characteristics of those pieces into a new creation.

Jude then takes that information and sketches out or makes notations on the photographs, drawings or other descriptive information from the customer so she can begin building the piece in wax form to create a model, or mold.

Jude then meets with the customer to review the model and sketch design to see if any changes are needed and get approval to proceed. "It's a lot easier to make changes to a wax model than a cast piece," Jude notes.

Casting

For pieces requiring casting, Jude sends a wax model to a casting factory. Most pieces use a lost wax method to cast the piece (which destroys the wax model). But in some cases, depending on the type of metal used in the piece, the casting house makes a rubber mold of the model and casts from the mold. Jude receives the raw unfinished piece from the casting factory and begins work on finishing the piece to the customer's specifications.

