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# Lindsay Marie Morris

## BLOG

### Crystal Artist Cristalli di Cat Draws Inspiration from Sicily and Family

September 15, 2024

Tags: [family](#), [crystals](#), [jewelry](#), [art](#)



Catherine Maita wears two of her crystal jewelry creations.

I would be remiss if I did not include my sister, Catherine Maita, among my picks for interviewees for this blog. Catherine studied abroad in Italy for a semester during her senior year, where she not only learned Italian and studied art history but also met her future husband on the isle of Capri.

An Orange County, California, crystals designer, Catherine crafts unique tablescapes and jewelry pieces, which she sells under the name of **Cristalli di Cat** at farmers markets and on her **Etsy store**. We sat down to chat about our childhood, the people who inspired her, her process, and her business's future.

#### CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CONNECTION TO SICILY?

Our maternal grandparents (**Nonni**) were Sicilian, and their families were from Porticello and Palermo. Mom's influence aligned our family with Sicilian culture and traditions throughout our youth. Sunday family meals prepared by Nonna, watching Italian soccer, and gardening with Nonno were some of my fondest childhood memories. During our cherished family time during these weekly visits, our Nonni shared much about our heritage. Being so connected to family and wanting to meet our relatives in Italy and visit our grandparents' homeland led me to sign up for a college semester abroad in Rome.

While abroad, I first lived with our Sicilian relatives in Palermo for three weeks before my time at the **American University of Rome**. During my stay in Sicily, I became wholly immersed in our family's heritage, meeting our relatives and hearing their stories. They also further introduced me to the Sicilian cuisine and culture. While there, I learned so much about our Nonni's upbringing. I visited Mondello Beach, where my Nonno would swim in the Mediterranean. I stood in the street where my grandparents first met as youth and met our cousin, who still runs our family's now third-generation **tabaccheria**.

During my semester in Rome, I returned to Sicily that fall for a weekend in Porticello to attend the **Festa Madonna del Lume** with our family. This grand celebration started with a town-wide religious procession, starting at the church where our Nonni were married. It was one of my favorite experiences of my time in Sicily.

#### WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR CRISTALLI DI CAT?

The name of my business is Italian for Crystals by Catherine. While studying in Rome, I took an art history course.

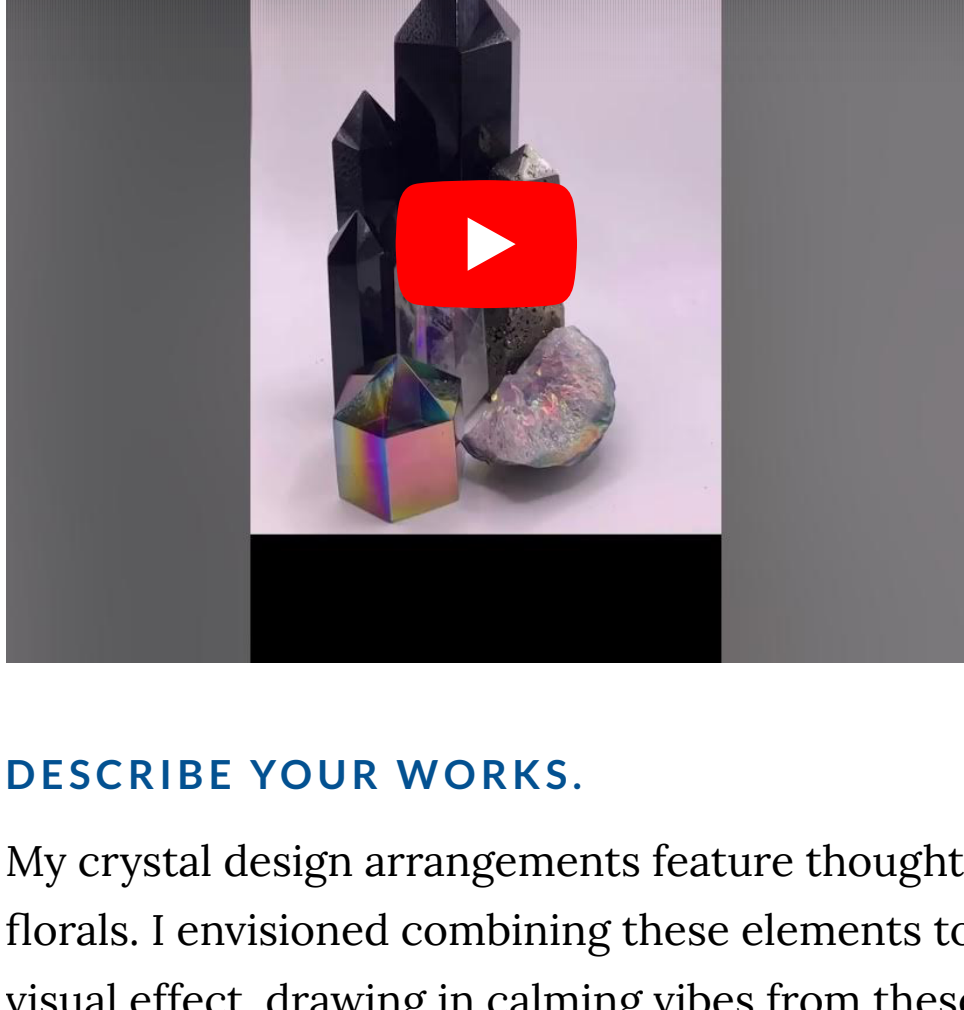
Before my time in Rome, our brother, Erik, had always inspired me with his creations: paintings, sculptures, and graphic designs. This influence was my baseline for being attracted to creativity, leading me to sign up for this class when enrolling for my semester coursework.

Daily lessons in this art history course were instructed outside a classroom. Classes took place among the art in churches around Rome, as famous artists painted frescoes that remain. During this class, we also frequently visited architectural structures in Rome. The designs and custom works throughout the city were genuinely fascinating, and I have held this inspiration for years.

When I lived in Rome, I also visited open markets every Saturday to practice conversational Italian through interactions with vendors. During these visits, I became attracted to stone- and crystal-designed jewelry and handmade creations by these local artists. I began collecting crystal and stone jewelry pieces for myself and as gifts for friends and family.

Several years after this college study-abroad experience, I turned to floral design as a creative outlet for stress relief management. I was coping with my emotions around our father's terminal illness, and designing became a soothing outlet for stress relief. I could reconnect with my passion for art. This therapy then translated to a business venture as I had friends and family encourage me to pursue starting my own small business to share my work with others.

I spent a full year visiting southern California artist markets on the weekend to get advice from small business owners and to gather inspiration for new designs. During that year, I also attended my first **Gem Faire** event. Exploring crystals at the fair, I felt an immediate connection to these elements. I knew then that I wanted to work with crystals and incorporate them into my design work.



#### DESCRIBE YOUR WORKS.

My crystal design arrangements feature thoughtfully curated crystals, stones, and dried florals. I envisioned combining these elements to create a soft (florals) and sharp (crystals) visual effect, drawing in calming vibes from these competing but connected properties.

My jewelry designs feature hand-selected crystals as pendants on gold chains. In my personal style, I layer accessories and encourage my clients to explore mixing properties of different crystals in their own stylish looks. I also design rings with vibrant and sometimes oversized stones, making many statement pieces. For my jewelry line, I don't have any two identical pieces, making each piece unique and one of a kind.

#### HOW DO YOU SOURCE YOUR MATERIALS?

I always want to ensure the quality of my materials for my clients. I source materials for my designs from a network of wholesale vendors who source directly from mines. I set up private viewings to hand-select elements. My other go-to space for curating materials is Gem Faires throughout Southern California and Arizona. I can find some of the most unique items at these fairs and support other small business owners. For my floral designs, I source from business owners of wholesale flower shops and from vendors at farmers markets.

#### WHAT IS YOUR PROCESS BEHIND DESIGNING A NEW PIECE?

Inspiration for my designs is a constant trail of ideas coming to me during nature hikes, visits to museums and art festivals, and time spent at calming places like Laguna Beach.

Another hobby I have had for years is photography. I am constantly taking photos of inspiring places and views around Southern California. When I need a dose of inspiration, I retreat to Laguna for a long walk and take photos of exciting views of the water and surroundings on the walking trails. My photo captures and viewing crystals at Gem Faires generally lead me to ideas for new designs and collections for my business.

I am very much in the moment when inspiration hits. I will literally be at a Gem Faire setting crystals together on a table, zoning out, and designing among the crowds. I also keep a design ideas notebook to capture my ideas and sketch out design looks. Once I have a vision for a new line, I work with my suppliers to source materials. Then, I bring myself to a calm space with music and materials and design the entire collection in one sitting. When the creativity is there, I don't stop designing until I feel the collection is complete.

#### WHAT ARE YOUR CULTURAL OR HISTORICAL INFLUENCES?

My floral designs are inspired by our Sicilian great-aunt Josephine. Following her retirement from teaching, Auntie Jo owned a floral design business. She had Parkinson's disease, and floral design was a calming escape from her ailments. She created beautiful works by hand, which she donated to local hospital gift shops in efforts to raise funding for Parkinson's research.

Every time we were together, Auntie Jo was designing or handcrafting gifts for people. She encouraged us all to design with her... It was a wonderful inspiration at a young age! We witnessed her work filling people with immense joy and bringing colorful art into their homes.

In my early adulthood, living in Rome and traveling throughout Europe during weekends and school breaks for four months at university there served as constant inspiration. I believe my bold, structured, and statement looks are drawn from my experiences and cultural immersion in the European lifestyle. The fast-paced movement, the fashion, and the fascinating history of Rome greatly influenced me. Cobblestone streets, quiet hilltop views of the city, busy streets, and historic structures all contribute to my design aesthetic. In Sicily, the ocean colors, vibrant tones of fruit at the markets, and the gorgeous landscapes inspired me so much. I captured so many design ideas then that I am now further exploring and infusing them into my work.

#### YOU DO CUSTOM WORK. CAN YOU DESCRIBE THAT PROCESS?

I create many personally envisioned designs but receive several custom requests for my work. Generally, in my custom orders, someone is looking for an arrangement to fill a home or office space or get a gift for a friend or family member. I also get requests for event design work. I have planned and hosted hundreds of events, from large-scale corporate events to intimate client engagements to birthday parties for my daughter.

For every custom order request, I'll first meet with a client to discuss their vision and ask them to send images of their space for the design. I ask for preferences for specific colors or healing properties they want to bring into their space. I always want to ensure that I have captured someone's vision, so I will create several different looks to provide options to the client. If I'm designing for a "zen den" or calming-type space, I'll generally have very soothing colors or soft florals like pampas. For event decor, it can be anything from helping to determine a theme to table settings and even guest party favors. I photograph these design looks and provide a lookbook that I pitch to clients. Seeing someone's vision brought to life in my work is always so fulfilling.

#### WHAT ARE YOUR MOST POPULAR PIECES?

Probably the most requested design is the crystal arrangement type I created when I launched my business. I call the design a "crystal garden." In this design, crystals and florals are combined and collected into a singular space on a wooden carved plate. These arrangements can easily be set on a side table in a room or atop an office desk. I have a client who keeps one in her yoga studio, and we have added several crystals over time to that space, which is now an entire "crystal wing" in her studio.

My other most requested pieces are large crystals in a design scape for a home entry or table centerpiece look. These generally include very unique crystals that I will source at Gem Faires.

Another very popular piece is my jewelry, which I just launched this year. I wear my creations for calming vibes and to amplify styled looks, and I generally will get customers by people approaching me to ask where I got my necklaces or rings. I am always thrilled to design jewelry for new and existing customers, as I can attest to the good energy and happiness that comes with these creations!

#### WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS, AND CAN YOU GIVE US A HINT ABOUT UPCOMING COLLECTIONS?

Since I launched my business in 2022, I have been involved in markets and in-store collectives. I also have an **e-commerce space on Etsy** and accept custom orders through **my website** and **Instagram**. I want to continue to grow my brand's presence in those spaces.

I am also in conversations with other artists about collaborations. I plan to expand my client base in the custom design space, as I have found great joy in bringing scapes into people's homes and other spaces. And I want to build my jewelry and accessories line.

Many clients return to me at markets or through message requests to add to their Cristalli di Cat jewelry collection. The response to my necklace creations led me to launch ring designs to complement necklaces as accessory sets. I will hopefully soon also have crystal earring designs to offer.

I have ideas for other special products for my shop in the future. I'd like to source and sell other home decor or lifestyle items that would elevate or enhance my pieces.

My favorite future plan is to continue to teach my daughter design and help her develop what I see as innate creative skills. She has launched her own side table kids' toys and games sales booth at markets where I am a vendor participant. I want to continue to inspire her to pursue her curiosities as a young entrepreneur and to encourage her to maybe one day start her own business or two.

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