

a TACTILE APPROACH



DONNA BARNAKO

BY DONNA CEDAR-SOUTHWORTH

Donna Barnako owned and operated Woolly Knits, a successful yarn shop in McLean, for 15 years. “I loved pulling color—yards and yards of color and putting things together.” When she closed her store in 2001 after working in retail for 15 years, it seemed a natural transition to move into beading. “I enjoyed the colors and the textures [of yarns], and that’s what took me into beading and to making jewelry. And now, I’m painting with beads,” she says.

“Because beads have so many more forms and textures than knitting yarns, I’m really in my element now—able to create whatever hits me at the moment,” she says. “One idea just leads to another.”

It’s one thing to read about, but it’s quite another to experience Donna’s jewelry creations firsthand. Her Great Falls studio contains drawers and drawers of beads organized by color—brilliant magentas and hot pinks; electric blues and aquamarines; deep, vibrant purples and soft lavenders; primary greens and chartreuses. She pulls from this extensive collection of beads whatever a specific creation calls for—international antiques or rare beads collected from her world travels,

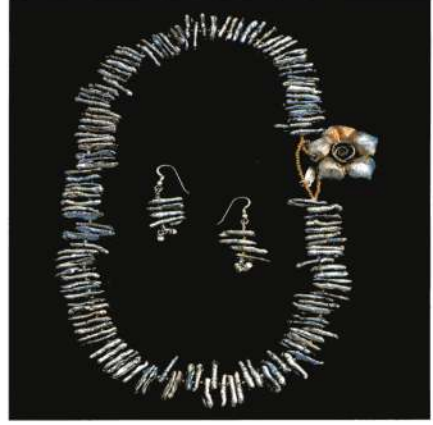
handmade beads and findings, lampworked Venetian glass, hollow Murano glass, Swarovski crystal, freshwater pearls, Caribbean shells and on and on it goes. “How can you not be inspired when you open a drawer? Isn’t it fabulous?” she asks. “It’s my inspiration.”

Her pieces are mesmerizing. The beads—a sea of color—are strung onto thin-gauge wire or fishing line and then stitched together in any one of a number of elegant patterns—herringbone, net, peyote, web, crochet—whatever the piece calls for.

Each piece tells its own story. She was inspired to create

“*‘Fleur d’Argent’ is a silver mesh bracelet composed of hundreds of Bali sterling beads, woven in an intricate webbed stitch pattern with a Thai silver flower.*”

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“Wedding on the Beach” while spending time in her vacation home overlooking the Westin Hotel on St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands. “In the summer, just about every evening, they have a little gazebo and we can stand there with our binoculars and watch the wedding take place—they’re in bare feet and long gowns. It seemed to me it was a marriage of the beach and the light and the wedding gown.”

Her “Wedding on the Beach” set, a popular seller in three St. John venues, features a necklace crafted in whites and creams, with freshwater coin pearls, while the accompanying bracelet is comprised of scores of sand dollars, shells, Lucite-encased sea creatures and vintage beads. The set provides a bride not only authentic, artful jewelry to wear on her wedding day, but it also affords her the opportunity to take a piece of St. John home with her.

Another piece, “Fish Gotta Swim,” showcases tiny turquoise and chartreuse beads on a 24-inch-long, eight-strand necklace. The stunning focal bead by Velma Dallas of Colorado has azure fish swimming in a crystal sea.

But not everything has to be colorful to appeal to the most discerning taste. For example, “Fleur d’Argent” is a silver mesh bracelet composed of hundreds of Bali sterling beads, woven in an intricate webbed stitch pattern with a Thai silver flower. Another similar bracelet, minus the Thai flower, has a clasp Donna made from precious metal clay, which is 99 percent silver.

And the jewelry creations not only look good, they feel good against the skin. “That’s very important when you’re making pieces that they should sit right,” says Donna, adding that she

considers herself a tactile person.

Regarding the question of whether a person should dress around a piece of jewelry, Donna has a more pragmatic approach: “I don’t see it as black or white. Certainly if you have a very special piece that costs a lot of money, you’re going to go out and look for a plain black dress. I look at it from another perspective. I sell to a lot of real estate agents [who] dress to the nines, and it’s easy for me with the kind of selection I have for them or any client to say, ‘I have this suit or dress. Can you make something special to go with it?’ And they trust me... and that comes from having the experience with the yarn and the knitting and the colors and putting it all together.”

Donna’s work is on display at the Potomac Craftsmen Gallery, located in Studio 18 at the Torpedo Factory Art Center in Alexandria. To view images of her jewelry collection, visit www.jewelworx.com. And for information on classes, contact her at 703-509-1643 or donna@jewelworx.com.



THIS PAGE, TOP ROW: FREEFORM PEYOTE STITCH BRACELET COMPRISED OF FRESHWATER PEARLS, HANDBLOWN GLASS, CZECH GLASS AND SEED BEADS; MIDDLE ROW, FROM LEFT: BEAD CROCHETED CHOKER NECKLACE WITH HANDWRAPPED AND HAMMERED BRASS DECORATIVE ACCENTS AND CLOSURE; BEAD CROCHETED NECKLACE IN BLACK AND CHARTREUSE WITH VENETIAN (MURANO) GLASS ACCENTS; AND FRESH WATER “STICK” PEARLS IN OIL SLICK COLORS WITH RAKU BUTTON CLOSURE; BOTTOM ROW: INTRICATELY STITCHED MESH NETTED BRACELET OF THAI STERLING SILVER BEADS WITH ARTIST-MADE FINE SILVER TOGGLE CLASP; FACING PAGE: “FISH GOTTA SWIM,” EIGHT STRANDS OF INTERWOVEN SEED BEADS, SWAROVSKI CRYSTAL AND CZECH GLASS WITH DICHROIC GLASS FOCAL BEAD BY DENVER ARTIST VELMA DALLAS. MATCHING CHANDELIER EARRINGS.



