

DARE TO DREAM

TRUE BEAUTY LIES IN IMPERFECTIONS, SAYS SINGAPORE-BASED JEWELLERY DESIGNER *CAROLYN KAN*. SHE SHARES HOW SHE BECAME AN “ACCIDENTAL” SILVERSMITH AND HOW HER CALLING FINALLY SET HER SPIRIT FREE



Carolyn Kan

I had fallen in love with Elizabetta Tognetti's workshop the moment I walked into the clutter of weathered workbenches and old tools. They looked like they had been passed on by generations of loving, calloused hands.

I was travelling in Europe trying to decide if I should make my last stop the desserts of Morocco or Florence. When I learnt about Elizabetta, a talented silversmith who taught the craft, the decision was made. I flew to Florence to learn to silversmith. It was there that I discovered making a simple ring was not simple at all. Elizabetta taught me to appreciate handcrafting silver jewellery the old way with time and great care.

Despite the lengthy process, I loved every step: from carving the blob of wax into a recognisable form to transforming that into a piece of jewellery that would bring a smile to someone's face. Even now, all the pieces in my collection are handcrafted with the same love for craftsmanship.

On the third rainy afternoon at Elizabetta's, as I was proudly putting the final polish to my very first wax cast ring, I looked up to the window and saw that the rain had just stopped and the sun was shining into the room. Just then I had an epiphany and I knew deep in my heart that I wanted to be a silversmith and jewellery designer. So Carrie K. was born.

My favourite journeys have all been unplanned ones. My best memories are of the happy accidents that have brought me to some place unexpected. I'm still living my latest unplanned adventure – my accidental life as a silversmith and jewellery designer. Fifteen years ago, I dreamed of becoming a silversmith. Then life took over and I forgot that dream as I climbed the corporate ladder to become the Managing Director of an international advertising agency in Singapore.

Two-and-a-half years ago, I had decided to give myself a year off the corporate race to go on a “one day” sabbatical where I would do all the things I had promised myself I would experience one day. Fortuitously, nearing the end of my sabbatical, I stopped by in Florence where I met Elizabetta and decided to realise and pursue my dream.

I have always believed in being true to oneself, to celebrate our quirks and showcase imperfections rather than hide it away because that is what makes us unique and individual. This is the essence of Carrie K. jewellery

For that reason, I usually stay away from precious, perfect, symmetrical stones – even with my high-end collections. Take the Signature Collection for example. My impetus for that collection

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was to craft a fine jewellery collection — but one that continues to reflect our essence of being true and celebrating imperfections rather than hiding it away.

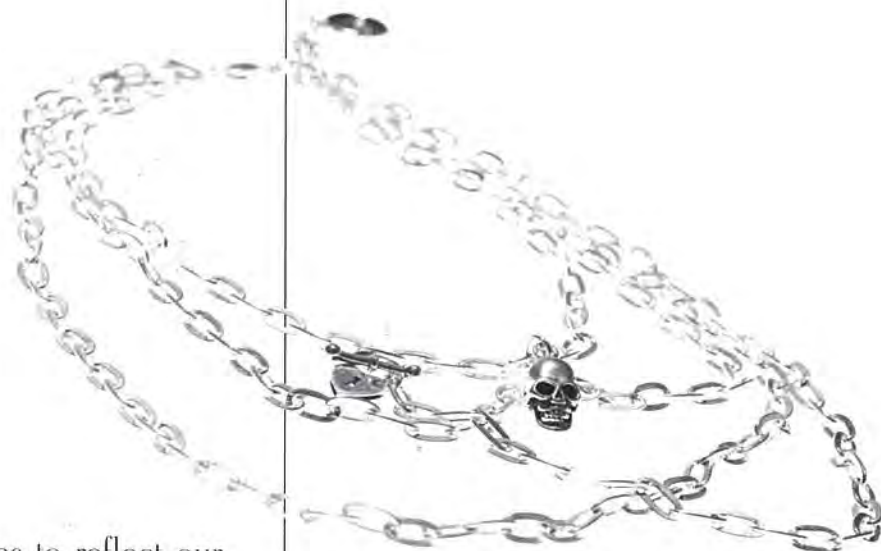
I started by looking for the perfect imperfect gem. I found it in the black Chalcedony druzi that I had polished such that part of the stone remained raw and unpolished. The idea was to juxtapose a random sprinkling of diamonds against the partially raw exposed druzi to show off its unique beauty. As each piece of druzi seemed to tell its own little story either in its colour or the shape of its unpolished heart, rather than display ready made pieces to be bought off the shelf, I would have customers pick the druzis that speak to them and then set their selection. I always believed that people have very personal connections to stones that have personality. That is why I tend to feature gems that are not cookie-cutter cuts but are mismatched in some way.

Sometimes, the birth of an idea is hijacked by influences along the way. ‘Woman in Chains’ from the Charmed Collection came to me as I was in the midst of crafting a necklace while Tears for Fears’ song ‘Woman in Chains’ was playing. It made me think of all the things women are bound by: from our quest for beauty and the way we place hopes in a bottle to our multiple roles as a boss, mother and wife. The result was a web of thick chains with multiple charms depicting things that bind us — literally and figuratively. These include lipstick charms and, of course, shoes and handbags. I designed it so that it could be customised by the wearer — after all, everyone’s ball and chain is different.

As I am a silversmith as well, many of my creations do not start from the drawing block but from the bench block. Many Carrie K. pieces often start off as experiments. The Molten Silver Cuff from the Raw Collection came to me while I was admiring the random lines and shadows of a wad of crushed paper. This in turn launched a raft of experiments that involved crushed paper, crushed aluminum and essentially anything crushable that would hold its texture. The final destination of weeks of crushing, moulding, casting and filing: a series of cuffs markedly different from one another. Each piece is handmade and not stamped like a cookie from one, singular, mould. Each piece looks purposely unpolished and seemingly imperfect.

Although the pieces are not identical in form or style, the philosophy of being true is constant across the Carrie K. line. In some small way, I hope to fuel an appreciation for jewellery that does not conform to traditional expectations of cookie-cutter perfection and to spread the love for artisanal jewellery that is handcrafted with great attention to detail.

My design and silversmithing process is much like the journey of my life — it has a veneer of a planned, smooth path but it’s actually a series of happy accidents that have happened as I’ve taken chances to veer off the path. The outcome is never set. And that makes the journey as pleasurable as getting to the destination. ▣



FROM TOP: Woman In Chains Skull & Lock Necklace; Molten Cuff; Round Druzy Diamond Ring