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BY AMY ABRAMS • PHOTO ELLIOT LINCIS

Egypt and Turkey are Vicky Jousan's favored destinations this year. She will make a pilgrimage to the exotic land of temples and gods to purchase hard-to-find gemstones for her latest handmade jewelry line. Previous adventures have led her to Tahiti, Morocco, Italy and Spain. "This is how I find my treasures," she explains.

Jousan uses only the highest-grade stones and silver to handcraft necklaces, bracelets, earrings and other wearable adornments. The artist claims that the materials are imbued with a special energy, "a high frequency that brings out the power within us," she explains. Whatever your spiritual path, whatever your beliefs, there is an unmistakable power and beauty in her works.

Ancient as well as contemporary cultures have attempted to use the power of stones and crystals for healing and as a connection to the divine. Stones and minerals have varied applications. Amethyst is reported to reduce anxiety and silver is often used to encourage feminine energies, for example.

While Jousan has a devoted base of buyers in the Valley, who purchase pieces directly from her Scottsdale studio, most of her business is transacted over the Internet at www.vjdesigns.com

"Almost 75% of my sales are generated from my website," explains Jousan. "People all over the world, from Europe and Asia, are collectors."

Repeat customers are the norm. "Once my customers find me, they're usually hooked," says Jousan with a smile. "My clients like a sophisticated, but funky look."

"People who are attracted to my works often have an individual sense of style," she adds. "They don't want something that looks like anything else." Each piece is one-of-a-kind and signed by the artist on an attached silver pendant.

With a reverence for the tactile qualities of her craft, Jousan likes hand carving the gemstones from the rock and then cutting and sometimes smoothing the multi-colored stones. More often, the stones are left in irregular shapes giving an earthy, organic look to her designs providing a dynamic contrast with her signature smooth, silver beads. This primitive yet elegant aesthetic is what makes her works unique.

With no formal art training, Jousan always leaned toward artistic pursuits. A job as a real estate agent sparked her creative side and she would create two paintings, when a house sold, for buyer and seller. Her sacred space was her painting studio on the third floor of her Rutherford, New Jersey home that she shared with her husband, Mike, before their move to Scottsdale in 1990.

"We downsized to a smaller house and there was really no easy place to set up a studio," says Jousan. The beginning of the jewelry career that followed came serendipitously.

"I had purchased an antique watch in New York and the elastic strap broke," recalls Jousan. "At a friend's suggestion, I went into 'Scottsdale Bead' to buy new elastic. When they didn't have any, they suggested I create a new beaded band by taking a class there. I said, 'Sign me up. I'm there.' The rest is history", she exclaims. After studying with a variety of teachers, Jousan slowly began her jewelry business.

Today, she holds her own classes for aspiring jewelry makers in her Scottsdale studio. Students learn her varied techniques and craft. Cost is by the hour plus materials.

"I love to teach," says Jousan. "You get out of yourself when you make something. All of a sudden, you're on a roll, just putting things together like wild. It's just, well... fun."

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