

# Vail Daily



- Special to Daily

## Jewelry with a conscience in Vail

Sustainable practices and eco-gold is nothing new for artist Carolyn Tyler  
 CASSIE PENCE  
 VAIL CO, COLORADO,

VAIL, Colorado — It's hard to do anything these days without that little voice in your head speaking up about the environment. "Do you really have to drive to the store," the voice might ask. "Are there pesticides on this peach?" "Did children sew this T-shirt?" Striving for sustainability has penetrated every aspect of life.

Even art — created purely for its beauty and enjoyment — is looking for ways to go green. Among artists in the jewelry industry, for example, there's a grassroots push to use eco-gold, recycled gold from pre-owned jewelry, so that no new gold is mined from the earth. For jewelry designer Carolyn Tyler, eco-gold is nothing new. Since Tyler began creating her pieces in 1993, she's bought only 24K ingots made from recycled gold. She uses these ingots to create a 22K gold alloy, adding copper and silver in specialized proportions. Her mixture creates a rich "gold nugget" color that's signature to all her work, and one of the reasons her pieces are sought after.

"Recycled gold is not any less expensive, I just instinctively knew it was the thing to do," Tyler said.

New gold mining is very detrimental to the environment in that it is essentially pit mining, Tyler said, which leaves unsightly gouges in the earth and poisons the water table with extraction chemicals like arsenic. In Asia, people have traditionally used gold jewelry as a portable, wearable form of wealth, and when times are tough, they head to the gold shop to turn their jewelry in for cash.

"In my opinion, there is potentially enough recycled gold in the world for many more of us independent jewelry designers to use it exclusively, and I wish people would," Tyler said, who has a studio and workshop in Bali. "I think with the price of gold so high now, lots of forgotten jewels will find their way out of grandma's drawer and into the refiner's office."

Tyler brings her newest collection to Karats in Vail Village for a trunk show this weekend. Besides the distinct warm gold of her jewelry, Tyler's pieces are known for their whimsical shapes, ancient-treasure feel and fine gemstones.

### Stones' circle of life

But like gold, there are concerns when it comes to mining gemstones, Tyler said. Gem mining also leaves holes in the earth, but the real concern is who is doing the mining. Is it children or slaves? Or is a cartel running the industry as portrayed in the film "Blood Diamond?" Digging deeper into the stones' circle of life, one must ask what the gem money is supporting and hope that it's not terrorism or drug lords.

"All of these concerns are mitigated by developing close relationships over time and really getting to personally know your suppliers," Tyler said. "I have been using the same suppliers for 15 years and have visited many of them in their home countries. One of them hosted me for five days during his daughter's Indian wedding in Jaipur, Rajasthan. What an experience."

At her workshop in Bali, 12 full-time and eight part-time Balinese goldsmiths — some descendants of jewelers for royal families and priests — bring Tyler's designs to life using ancient techniques. Tyler is proud of her role to preserve the ancient craft of granulation, a painstaking embellishment technique where goldsmiths drop gold filings into a hot stone or brick and the pieces sizzle into tiny, perfectly round balls of gold. Craftsmen then take the golden spheres and form a decorative pattern that Tyler has drawn for them. Egyptians invented the art, but very few cultures still practice granulation.

"I have stayed true to my vision of supporting my amazing team of Balinese craftsmen in their dying art," Tyler said. "If I moved my production to China, as John Hardy's company is doing, I would lose that lovely handmade feeling, and my genius goldsmiths would become waiters and taxi drivers."

### 'A wearable kaleidoscope of color'

It's Tyler's fascination with "phenomenal" gems — those that possess unique qualities of light refraction like opal, ammolite and star sapphire — that continues to drive her designs. And if anyone understands the power of gemstones, it's Tyler. A lost opal pendant once sent Tyler on an odyssey that eventually led her to Bali and her thriving jewelry-making business. She had surrendered the opal as gone forever, when years later, the cosmos returned it. Since then, Tyler has never removed the necklace from the place over her heart.

Tyler has started to incorporate unusual materials into her work, like fossils and ancient coins, to create pieces she describes as "over the top." One of her newest pieces, for example, combines fossils, champagne diamonds from Australia and opalized gem ammolite to create a wearable kaleidoscope of color.

"More than ever I have decided to remove all mental restrictions from my design impulses and just go wild, like I was when I first started in 1993," Tyler said. "Back then I was just amusing myself, dreaming up jeweled fantasies without financial concern — just knowing the buyer would appear."

What first attracted Tyler to Karats is owner Dan Telleen's philosophy: Jewelry should be as unique as the individual who wears it. Tyler couldn't agree more, and she continues to create with that same attitude.

"My true joy is creating a one-of-a-kind pieces worthy of museum display," Tyler said.

Cassie Pence is a freelance writer based in Vail.

#### **Meet the artist ....**

What: Trunk show with Carolyn Tyler.

When: Friday, Saturday, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. On Sunday Tyler won't be in the store, but her jewelry will be.

Where: Karats in Vail Village, 122 East Meadow Drive, Vail.

Information: Call 970-476-4760.

#### **See her at Saks**

In an unusual departure from manufactured jewelry, Saks Fifth Avenue has chosen to represent jewelry artist Carolyn Tyler's one-of-a-kind designs. Her work is exhibited at Saks in New York and Beverly Hills, along with other prime locations.

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