



Beautiful beads



Jeweller Moi Mathieson tells [Carolyn Henderson](#) why her one-off and bespoke designs are the toast of the town...

Nothing fazes jeweller Moi Mathieson. Not even the owner of several Saluki dogs who wanted her to make elegant beaded and tasselled collars for her equally elegant canines, or the customer who requested a unique set of rosary beads.

"The rosary beads did make me think," admitted Moi, whose Lavenham shop has become a not-so-well-kept secret for those wanting one-off handmade designs.

"I had to go and ask a friendly vicar whether there should be a certain number of beads and whether it had to be blessed by a priest."

When you see the quality and originality of her work, it's hard to believe that three years ago, she was employed in marketing.

Even harder to comprehend when you see the beautifully detailed drawings displayed alongside the necklaces, bracelets and earrings, is that as a student, she was turned down when she applied to do a fine art degree course.



"They rubbished my portfolio," said Moi, whose first name is short for Moira and pronounced accordingly. "My style is tight and detailed and the fashion then was to let everything flow.

"So I went and did a degree in sports science and business studies instead. Four years later, I became marketing manager for a coat hanger factory. I know everything about coat hangers there is to know!"

Her sense of humour and refusal to be typecast must be one of her greatest assets.

She enjoys the pun in her shop's name – Made by Moi – and although she jokes about the coat hangers, it was a job that got her involved in design and print and took her all over Europe.

A leap of faith

Three years ago, she had what she describes as a "lightning moment", took voluntary redundancy and started Made by Moi.

"I'd always made jewellery for myself," she said. "I've never been trained, I just took things apart, saw how they were made and worked out how to do it. Maybe that's the science background!"

This included teaching herself lampwork, using a controlled flame to melt glass and steel rods and shaping the molten pieces into beads.

I'm a great believer in fate

She also works with handmade and painted beads and semi-precious stones such as jasper and agate, stringing and mounting them on special multi-stranded wire. For special commissions she can work with gold.

"I look at the materials first and then do the design," she said. "I never design a piece and then find the materials to work with. I don't know why, it's just the way it happens."

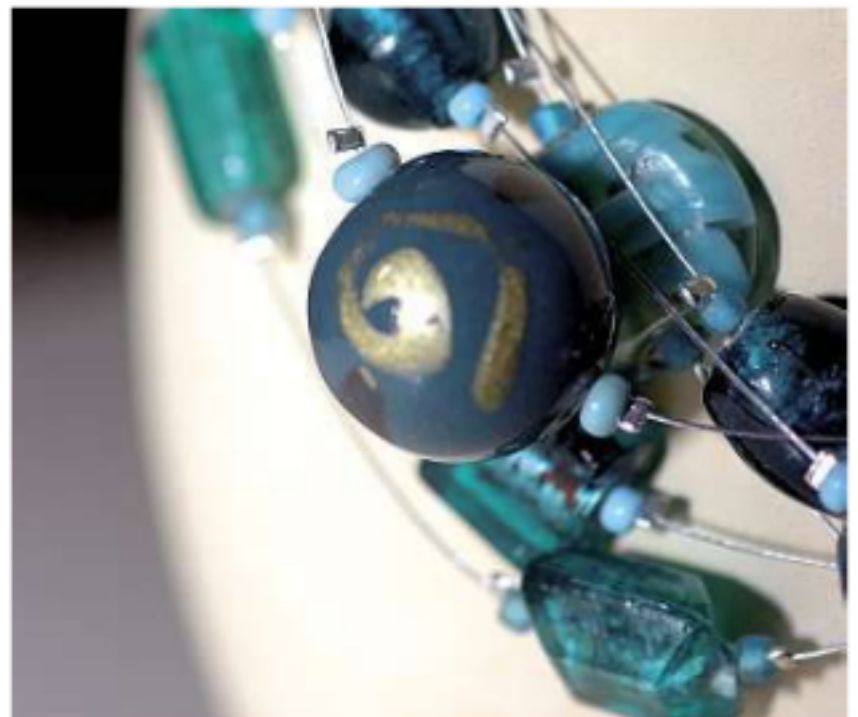
At first, Moi sold her jewellery at craft fairs and private parties. Encouraged by her success, she realised she needed a shop and last year, found what seemed to be the ideal premises in Sudbury.

"Then it all went wrong and I lost most of my Christmas trade, though I picked up what I could from craft fairs," she said.

"But I'm a great believer in fate – and I got a call from one of my customers who said her husband had a shop to rent in Lavenham, if I wanted to see it.

"It was love at first sight. I got the keys on December 14, fitted it out myself and opened on January 4. It was so exciting, and still is. Every day, I come into work and think 'this is my shop'."

Moi works upstairs, in an impressively neat environment where beads are in separate trays and everything is in its place.



For company, she has the amiable Gulliver, who she thinks is a Labrador crossed with a collie.

She insists that she never gets bored. "I'll have my head down making things, then suddenly look up and realise it's four o'clock, or that it's been raining for ages and I haven't noticed," she said.

"And, of course, I love talking to customers. Once they realise that I make all my jewellery and that everything is a one-off, they're fascinated."

Branching out

Moi's pen sketches are also in demand and have proved to be another good business venture.

"I do drawings of wedding venues and personalise them for couples with their names and the date," she said. "It's a bit different and people say it makes a lovely memento."

However, one of her favourite sales was of a drawing of The Swan Inn at Lavenham.

"A couple came in who were staying there and I thought the man was going to buy it," she said. "He didn't, so I forgot about it."

"The next day, they came back and the woman was really excited because they'd become engaged. He'd proposed to her that night at The Swan and came back to buy the drawing."

Moi also makes bespoke pieces, which are particularly popular as wedding jewellery, to mark special occasions or simply to complement an outfit that nothing else seems to work with.

She's determined to keep her originality. "I could send my designs to China and have lots of them in lots of shops," she said.

"But it's all about me being me and being able to tell someone everything about a necklace. In 10 years time I hope I'll still be here, still doing this."

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