

Bead it!



PHOTO BY AHMED KUTTY

Much of what I do involves taking a piece of wire and stringing some beads onto it ... taking them off again until I get it right," says Joanna Shortall.

Combining silver pieces from yesterday with sparkling Swarovski crystals and fancy beads, Joanna Shortall creates jewellery for today

Some people count sheep to help them fall asleep but Joanna Shortall counts beads.

"I lie in bed at night and dream about beads," the British-born entrepreneur says. "I used to wake up in the middle of the night and worry about whether people would like my designs."

But that was two years ago, when Shortall first launched her jewellery business, Bumble Beads. Now the Abu Dhabi-based designer's biggest challenge is finding enough time to create the multitude of necklaces, bracelets and earrings needed to fill private orders and her table at local craft fairs.

Using Swarovski crystals, which she orders from distributors in the US and Europe, and old medallions and original silver beads that she hunts for in local shops and Omani souqs,

Shortall creates pieces that keep her customers coming back for more.

"I like traditional costume and jewellery," she says. "When I arrived in 1986, the UAE was a much more traditional place and I was inspired by the beauty of artefacts I found in local shops." In particular, the patina of old silver caught her eye. "I've always been really interested in silver. I don't like gold. Years ago, there was a shop in Dubai (Al Hassani) run by a Yemeni man who sold local things, along with pieces from Oman and his homeland. I used to spend a lot of time in his shop pouring over the pieces of silver he brought in."

After years of admiring antique jewellery, Shortall began seeing the old pieces in a new light. "I've collected lots of silver pieces over the years, some that you wouldn't even wear, but suddenly I started thinking

about changing things on the pieces I found ... like adding bits and beads, moving parts around." When Shortall began studying the construction and design of the jewellery she thought: "I can do that!"

It's time consuming, finding the special pieces that take centre stage in her necklaces, but for Shortall, the hunt is half the fun. "I am a real shopper," she says with a wry grin. "I love going to little, tucked away places and just rummaging through a bowl of old beads."

Like most artists, she feels she is always perfecting her craft. "Much of what I do involves taking a piece of wire and stringing some beads onto it, fiddling with different shapes and sizes, putting them into combinations and then taking them off again until I get it right." She keeps a mirror handy, trying her on creations as she creates them. She laughs as she admits, "I'm often fixing what's gone wrong!"

Judging by the number of women in Abu Dhabi sporting sparkling bumble beads, Joanna Shortall spends most of her time getting it right. Shortall can be reached at: joanatel@emirates.net

– Shannon Patterson Linden