

# Professional Jewelry Designer?



**K**as Jacquot has lived many lives. She has been a hog farmer, a basket maker, a stained glass artist and, since 1975, a jewelry designer. Jacquot did mostly freelance work until opening her own storefront in 1984. The store, operating out of two Victorian houses in the Old Munichberg section of Jefferson City, recently placed fourth in In Store magazine's "America's Coolest Stores" contest. Her jewelry designs have won statewide and international awards, putting her in league with the top jewelry designers in the country. Jacquot spoke with HER about her continued success, and how she got to where she is today.

**HER: When did you know you wanted to become a jewelry designer?**

**Kas Jacquot:** It's a story I've told a lot, but when I was 5 years old, I took my mother's jewelry box and a butter knife out on the porch and started taking apart her green necklace. My mother was horrified, even though it was only costume jewelry. Today, green stones are still my favorite. I like to say I had to learn to make jewelry to get jewelry.

**HER: How did you get into designing jewelry?**

**KJ:** I was living on a farm in the southern Missouri Ozarks during the "back to the land" movement of the 1970s, and a lot of people had moved in from all over the country. To earn a little extra money, I started making baskets and stained glass and started to do art fairs. I think if I would have continued making baskets I would have been a basket case! A man from Arizona moved near us and wanted to trade his jewelry-making equipment and lessons for hogs. I didn't want to, but my now ex-husband said if I wouldn't, he would, and that's how it started. I also had a friend who graduated from the New York Art Institute and one that made traditional jewelry in Johnson County, Kan. With help from them, and some trial and error, I began making jewelry. After that, I began taking courses with the Gemological Institute of America to become a gemologist.

**HER: Who or what inspires your work?**

**KJ:** For the people I do custom pieces for, I am inspired by them: their style and their lives. Other pieces I make, I'm inspired by the gemstone. I try to make pieces that complement the gemstones used. I also have classic inspirations. I recently went to a show in New York of Van Cleef & Arpels (a French jewelry company founded in 1896) designs that inspired me. I've been inspired by those kind of design houses my entire career. I have also been attracted to and restored fine antique and estate pieces. I'm inspired by their old world craftsmanship.

**HER: What is your least favorite part of your job?**

**KJ:** I'm a creative person, so I dislike the business part of my job. The creative part is my favorite, but the business part is my least favorite.

**HER: What advice would you give someone wanting to become a jewelry designer?**

**KJ:** I would tell them to learn about the jewelry making process, learn about the structural aspect of jewelry and learn about gemstones. Look at the history of jewelry and develop your own style. I started this business with \$50 worth of silver and hand tools and three hogs. You can never lose sight of your goal, and creative people tend to get sidetracked. Myself, I got sidetracked a number of times into other parts of the business, like restoring old buildings. Try to find a balance between the business part and the creative part. I have that balance now, but it was one of the hardest parts I had to learn.

**HER: How can a designer make a name for themselves and build clientele?**

**KJ:** There's a lot of different ways now. I've entered and won a lot of design competitions,

both nationally and at the state level. You can also promote yourself through the Internet and Facebook. Social media now makes it a different game than when I started; you can promote yourself through that. Being involved in the community and donating to charity events to get your jewelry out there is also a good way to promote yourself. Get referrals from those you've made jewelry for before for new clients. I say I'm my best billboard because I wear only my designs. Being out there in the community with your jewelry on is a great way to promote your designs locally.

**HER: How many hours do you work each week? What is a typical day like for you as a designer and business owner?**

**KJ:** On a typical day, I'm working with clients, I'm taking photos, I'm doing appraisals, and I'm looking at our displays and working with the other people here in the shop, especially on our website. We just today got our diamond pricing up and working on our website. I also do all the merchandising and advertising. I'm working with a graphic designer now, but I create the ideas for all of our advertisements. I may not be physically in the store 80 hours a week, but I say I work 80 hours a week because I'm always working on it. Like right now, I'm creating a harness horse that's going to be set in chocolate diamonds. I have a connection through the harness horse industry because my fiancé's family breeds harness horses in New York, but I also am a "horse person" and was interested in doing this project, so that's the reason I'm doing this along with my daughter. That's something that could be promoted through the jewelry industry or through the horse industry.

**HER: How difficult is it to balance your work with your personal life?**

**KJ:** It's extremely hard, because now my fiancé is the business manager here. So we might be trying to sleep and one of us has an idea, and we keep the other one up, or we might be out to dinner having fun and something comes up ... When you're your own business owner, it's hard to put that away. I'm a fourth-generation entrepreneur, and I know it was hard for my father, as well. Not everyone puts their heart and soul into their business, but historically, my family did and I do, too.

**HER: What challenges have you encountered in your career path?**

**KJ:** The economy was certainly a challenge; there were three years there where we saw a steady decline in sales. Now, with the re-creation of the business we're more focused on diamonds and bridal, and I'm back. I had to quit watching the news because it was so depressing. And I thought at one point ... that there was a possibility I could fail. Clearly that didn't happen though, and now we're getting close to our 2005 numbers, which was the second best year I ever had.

**HER: What type of education is needed for this career?**

**KJ:** You don't really need anything but some art training to make jewelry. But, I was very interested in colored gemstones, which is the most difficult part of the business, because there is no color grading systems for gemstones, so they can vary in value, because of a slight difference in hue or tone. The only way to learn is to get hands-on experience. Diamonds are a science, but colored gems are an art. That was interesting to me, but some people just use "fun" stones that aren't as valuable.

**HER: How do you stay current on trends and changes in the industry?**

**KJ:** Every year, I go to workshops and seminars to keep up with gem enhancements and treatments, for me that is an important part of my business. I also read seven different jewelry business publications, the leaders in the industry, that's the other way I stay current. I'm a member of the American Gemological Society. Every year there's a five day conclave somewhere in the country.





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