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\*SPECIAL ISSUE

# Persistence and Talent Win

Hard work and a courageous attitude bring decades of success.

by LAUREN SABLE FREIMAN | photo by KEITH BORGMAYER

*Kas Jacquot, owner of Kas A Designs, shares her secrets to success as she celebrates 40 years in the jewelry business. With an unlikely and unusual beginning, her only collateral consisted of three hogs and \$50 of hand tools as she built her business from the ground up and pursued the training to create one-of-a-kind jewelry.*

*“Not bad for a married teenage mother and high school dropout,” she says.*

**Learning to be fearless:** I moved to the Southern Missouri Ozarks in 1974 during the back-to-the-land movement when a lot of people were moving down there. I started out living in a tent for three months while building a cabin. Eventually, I added property and was living on a self-sustaining farm in the middle of the Mark Twain National Forest, where I raised hogs. I had a herd of 28 milk goats, made cheese, had chickens, grew 125 tomato plants and harvested a big herb garden. To further supplement the farm income, I made stained glass and wove baskets. These experiences helped me realize I could survive without very much, which helped me become more fearless.

**A man from Arizona changes everything:** A man moved into the area, a silversmith from Arizona, who wanted to get into the hog business. He offered to trade turquoise, hand tools and lessons in jewelry making in exchange for three sows. He let me watch him work for a week, we traded the sows for the stones and jewelry equipment, and I was on my own.

I sat in the middle of the floor making a ring, and I melted three in a row. This trade was a much better one for him than me.

**Finding inspiration in unlikely places:** I began to make more rings. After I completed about 15 rings, I went to my first art show in Mountain View, Arkansas, to sell jewelry. I didn’t do very well and only sold a couple of rings. However, a woman from the next booth, who became a friend, had a sign that said, “Failure cannot cope with persistence.” I chose that for my mantra throughout my entire career.

People from the shows continued to give me sales tips, and it helped me become more successful at shows all over the country. I took gemology correspondence courses from the Gemological Institute of America and bought, restored and sold antique jewelry. Soon thereafter, I started making more expensive gold jewelry with colored gemstones and, as a result, priced myself out of the art show market.

**In a moment, life changes:** About that time my mother was killed in a car accident, and my grandmother didn’t have anyone to take care of her. I came back to Jefferson City, my hometown, in 1980. In 1985, I opened my first store at 312 W. Dunklin. People told me I’d never make it there, but I did.

**Hard work and independence pay off:** I started traveling to the world’s largest gem show in Arizona, and for two years I worked with a vendor as a gemologist to learn how to color grade and recognize the varieties of gemstones. Then I made contacts all over the world with people who own mines, and I started importing gemstones. The demand for my jewelry increased, and at Christmastime I was working 20 hours a day. The business grew and doubled every year. I won my first international design competition in 2004 and also won six or seven statewide design competitions. I joined the American Gem Society, a prestigious association for jewelers, and was a member for five years.

Growing up I spent a lot of time with my grandmothers, and we were always making things. We drew, embroidered, crocheted and baked. These were women who encouraged me to do what I wanted to do. When I declined a full-ride college accounting scholarship to go to the Ozarks, my mother said, “I wanted you to be independent, but I went too far.”



► Kas’ first ever custom-made ring and early days of jewelry designing.

**Intertwined with the community:** I love this business and love working with my customers, with people who have entrusted me with their most treasured possessions. When you’ve been in business 40 years, you become a part of so many people’s lives, thousands of people.

**Ready to enjoy what she’s sown:** I’m 63, I’ve been in business 40 years, and I am not the workaholic I once was. I’m ready to enjoy the fruits of my labor and would like to slow down a bit, maybe sell more of my designs nationally to a large corporation that owns a lot of jewelry stores. I would like to downsize, have a smaller showroom, and I’d like to do more design by appointment rather than having a store open all of the time with me running it. I think I’ll always make jewelry. I love the art, the creation.

Although I don’t want to be a hog farmer again, I’ve been thinking about raising goats along with bees and chickens. I still raise a very large organic vegetable garden. I do love the farm life. **JC**



