



jewellery making workshops with Debbie Smith

Sussex based jewellery designer and maker Debbie Smith runs popular workshops from her Lindfield studio, *ingénu/e* magazine quizzed her to find the secret of her success.

You've been making jewellery for some time now, what got you started?

I've no idea where the idea came from – but I always wanted to design and make jewellery. No-one in my immediate family was artistic but I always loved making things from nothing and I then set my heart on becoming a jeweller. I trained at the Sir John Cass School of Art and I was taught by real professional trade craftsmen who believed that in terms of finish, craftsmanship and style, as much care should be taken with the back of a piece of jewellery as the front. I have never forgotten this ethos.

When did you decide to set up on your own, and what prompted you to start teaching?

I worked in the trade in London for many years as a designer and jeweller before going self-employed as a designer. After moving from London to Sussex I set up my own workshop and after completing a Post Graduate Certificate in Education I decided to pass on my knowledge – and teach from the workshop – that's how it all started!

Your jewellery making workshops have proved very popular, what could someone like me, who knows next to nothing about jewellery making, expect to achieve from attending one?

The question I always get asked is "Do I have to be creative?" and the answer is "No!" What you do need is enthusiasm, vision, patience, dexterity... and the eagerness to learn a new skill! I have designed a six week Beginners Course that takes students through the very basic jewellery making skills to having an understanding of techniques which they can then build on. They will make a silver ring, earrings and a pendant and also learn about metals, silver soldering etc. All tools and metal are provided.

After the initial six weeks, I encourage students to follow their own path. They are not constrained by a curriculum, students work at their own pace and with

a maximum of five to a class I am able to give them all plenty of my time. I arrange trips to London to introduce them to trade contacts such as the bullion and stone dealers and we also enjoy visits to museums, The London Assay Office and current jewellery exhibitions.

What sort of people do you find attracted to your workshops, and what do you enjoy about teaching jewellery making?

The workshop courses attract people from all walks of life, who are all thrown together! Many friendships have been made and for some it is an outlet from the stresses of busy lives and for others it has become a source of income as they have gone onto develop their own small business selling their own pieces through galleries and direct to the public. I find their achievements hugely rewarding!

"I have been studying with Debbie for 5 years

and from the day that I enrolled on a 6 week course I knew my life was going to change. What started as a desire to learn how to make my own silver jewellery has turned into a modest business that I love. Debbie's teaching methods are based on her own excellent skills and qualifications and has enabled many students to benefit from them – she is truly inspirational." Lindsay Willmott, West Sussex

"I have learned so much from Debbie's classes over the last few years, she really enables students to stretch themselves and develop designs from start to finish. There is a lovely relaxed atmosphere, with students sharing ideas and offering feedback and encouragements. I like that when an individual is learning a new process for their piece, Debbie encourages the rest of us to be involved." Hannah, Haywards Heath

For more information call 01444 483138 or go to www.thejewellery-workshop.co.uk

