



**boutique  
zest**

We at Zest boutique stock a wide range of Australian and imported labels including Verge, Transit, Sita Murt & David Pond.

5-7 byron street byron bay 2481  
ph 6685 5508 open 7 days

## NORTH COAST DESIGNERS

# A CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP

*Don and Vanessa Kennedy's award winning jewellery is created from their shared passions*

When Don and Vanessa Kennedy first met, Don complimented Vanessa on her jewellery – two rings she'd designed herself based around a collection of gems she'd inherited. While Don was probably the most experienced person to appreciate Vanessa's designs, he certainly wasn't the first. At that time she worked in both the beauty industry and in home interiors, and clients had often encouraged her interest in jewellery design.

Don and Vanessa clearly had much in common, but it was another six years before they finally became a couple. And their courtship was anything but dull: there were busy day jobs plus an unusual after-hours business. "I trained to be a pyrotechnician and did fireworks shows with Don," Vanessa says. "He'd come and help me hang curtains during the day, and then at night I'd go and help him blow things up!"

After finally collaborating as designers on the jewellery for their wedding, the couple decided to open a shop at Coffs Harbour's Promenade in 2001, a few months before their nuptials. With the combination of Vanessa's business acumen and creative flair and Don's impeccable technical skills, the pair quickly built up an enviable reputation. This winter marks the 10th anniversary of Kennedy Jewellers, and while the business has grown hugely during that time, Don and Vanessa say their creative process remains intrinsically the same.

"Don and I have a really unique way of working where I sort of build him a story," Vanessa says. "I'll use reference points like nature, buildings or previous designs, and then tie them back to a storyboard where we'll sketch out principles of the design." Once the concept has evolved to include dimensions, Don retreats to his light-filled workshop above their showroom. His technical expertise has been showcased in pieces such as a pair of gold spectacles with a nose bridge reminiscent of Sydney Harbour Bridge. Inspired by Lady Gaga, it was a finalist in the prestigious 2010 Marie Claire and JAA (Jewellers Association of Australia) Awards.

It was no surprise that Don became a master jeweller: during his youth his family was bequeathed his grandfather's 20 tonne mineral collection. Don was inspired to take courses in silver wire techniques and gem cutting before he left country NSW for an apprenticeship in Sydney. And Vanessa's inherited gems were partly responsible for her career change. "I see shapes and patterns in the loose stones that are sitting there," she says. "I like the challenge of being able to see a design from a pile of loose components."

While the Kennedys primarily sell jewellery designed by themselves and crafted by Don (with the assistance of apprentice jeweller Gemma Bannerman), they've recently added to their stock a collection from prestigious Danish jewellery house Ole Lynggaard Copenhagen (famous for creating jewellery for the Danish Royal Court, including Princess Mary). But Don and Vanessa are still committed to keep pushing their own creative boundaries – they're about to start work on a piece that they expect to take more than 400 hours to produce. "It's for the next big jewellery awards and it's going to be one of our most personally challenging, technically difficult, very intricate works," Vanessa says. It seems the couple's best design work may be yet to come.

**Kennedy Jewellers, The Promenade, 321 Harbour Drive, Coffs Harbour**



WORDS: MELISSA ELIUS IMAGES: RUSSELL PELL