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Image // Tandy Rowley

Kennedy Legacy

Don and Vanessa Kennedy live and love life to the fullest. Their passions extend to a variety of work they do in and out of their business, but they are nowhere more evident than in their distinctively stunning range of jewellery, highlighted at Kennedy Jewellers in Coffs Harbour. **By Simon Garner.**

Don's passion for his craft lies in the ability to turn a sketch into a piece of fine jewellery from a bar of solid gold, using only his hands and classic jewellery tools.

"No fancy machines or mass making techniques – it's awesome," he says. "It's a primal instinctual feeling – many years ago the same instinct would have been behind the making of spear heads for hunting. Instead, it's diamond necklaces, big cocktail rings and many other pieces where I apply it."

For Vanessa it's a love and passion for working with exceptional materials – she says it places her in a breeding ground of design inspiration.

"Vividly coloured and impeccably cut sparkling gems and diamonds that look like fire, with rainbows caught inside; lustrous pearls and precious metals are generally where I begin my design," she says. "Sometimes it's the design concept before the materials, but mostly I love to source the materials first and then the ideas flow."

She says their favourite part of the world from which to source materials is right on their doorstep. "Australia first and foremost – the coloured diamonds, especially the rare pinks from Argyle, Broome's South Sea pearls... so many gemstones we use also

come from Australia," says Vanessa. "If it's not out of the earth or ocean, Kennedy Jewellers don't use it – it would be unfortunate to use anything less than nature's best in our handcrafted designs."

There are other good reasons for obtaining materials closer to home. So many countries mine beautiful stones, but Don and Vanessa are careful to choose sources where conflict and corruption-free processes prevail. They have firm views about supporting fair work and trade, and are therefore selective about those with whom they deal.

Their range is breathtaking. As designers and jewellers, they believe the world is their oyster when it comes to creating beautiful pieces. Demand is always strong for original designs – diamond rings, pearl pendants, earrings, and the 'Couture Collection' pieces. These are amazingly brilliant one-of-a-kind items and feature some of the rarest and most beautiful diamonds, gems and pearls. Some of the pieces have taken more than 200 hours to complete.

Then there are the award pieces. Kennedy Jewellers has finished in the top finalists of all awards they have entered – including the JAA Jewellery Awards (with Vogue 2008 and Marie Claire 2010), Diamond Guild Australia and Harpers Bazaar 2009, an invitation-only event.

"We entered GaGa Vision at the JAA Awards – 18 carat gold fashion spectacles inspired by their namesake, a working maze pendant, a 0.46 carat Argyle pink diamond sliding ring, and many more pieces," Vanessa says.

Creating spectacular award pieces is one thing, crafting individual and personal items for customers is another. People purchase jewellery for many different reasons. There are some, including customers of Kennedy Jewellers, who are lucky enough to adopt the same rationale as Richard Burton when gifting jewels to Elizabeth Taylor... "just because it's Tuesday."

"What more reason than being in love do you need to give jewels randomly?" Vanessa laughs.

Most, however, purchase fine jewellery for life's most important moments – engagements, weddings, birthdays, anniversaries and the birth of children/grandchildren. Vanessa says significant milestones like graduations are becoming increasingly popular also.

And because most of us don't have the resources of someone like Richard Burton at our fingertips, achieving the best possible value for money in individually crafted pieces of jewellery is critical. Don and Vanessa are well aware of this.

"It would be remiss of us as professional jewellers with our clients' best interests in mind not to consider their budget when assisting with a purchase," Vanessa says. "After years of working with different gemstones and techniques it gives us the advantage of offering a varied approach. Say a client is set on a pink diamond but doesn't have the funds, we might suggest a pink sapphire, or use the pink diamond as a smaller feature."

"You have to tap into what is driving the desire. If a certain type of stone or quantity of them is needed, that's the non-variable part of the design, and therefore the other factors can be varied for budgeting. We are happy to work for as long as it takes to fit the

client's needs and budget. But most importantly, they always leave with an item they truly love," she says.

To continually create individually distinctive pieces of jewellery, the designer's eye is always looking out for fresh sources of inspiration. Vanessa says they have an uncanny knack of trend forecasting. "We often design pieces then see similar design concepts showing up in the following seasons," she says. "Inspiration comes from so many sources. For instance, the 18 carat gold spectacles made for the 2010 JAA/Marie Claire Awards is inspired from the music icon, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, spiders' webs and expandable vanity mirrors."

And while so much of their passion permeates all they do as jewellers and business people, there are other important beliefs and causes that drive Don and Vanessa's passions in other directions within their local community – and further afield. They had originally intended to display all their award pieces in a gallery in their store, but instead decided to sell them and donate a significant portion of the funds to the Early Childhood Intervention Centre in Coffs Harbour.

It's a cause close to their hearts, as they and their son Freddie attend the Centre for support, education and therapies to assist with Down Syndrome.

"We're driven by more than just a passion to make beautiful jewels, to provide for us and our family, or even to just enjoy life," Vanessa says. "We are driven to make an impact in the world, to show God's love to others in a tangible and practical way, to help people in need locally and abroad. We work with charities close to our hearts...to meet the needs of the disabled, disadvantaged, downtrodden and abandoned."

"We have been blessed with the opportunity to build a strong business that provides a platform for our philanthropic endeavours."

Kennedy Jewellers can be found at The Promenade, 321 Harbour Drive in Coffs Harbour. For enquiries call (02) 6650 9940 or visit www.kennedyjewellers.com.au.

