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JEWELRY DEALER GOOD AS GOLD

By Grant Harvey, Journal Intern

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After James Cleland spent roughly eight years earning degrees in biosciences and geology attempting to secure a Ph.D in paleontology, he has run everything from a rock shop to an antique shop – and now a fine art jewelry dealer known as Designs in Gold in Solvang.

Not to mention he digs for fossils in Montana over the summer. Ever since moving from the St. Louis area for convenience more than a year ago, Jim has featured the finest in unique and custom design jewelry.

He works with his wife, Ginger Cleland, who is an estate jewelry dealer at the antique center, and together they have created a vast repertoire of new jewelry, estate (antique) jewelry, to everything in between.

"We've carried anything from the era of colonial King George to 2 years old," says Jim. He just isn't a dealer, however. More importantly Jim is a crafter and that is his true profession. He does engravings, piercings, replenishing and has recently started professional-style engraving, which is a lot more difficult and will require him to take additional schooling. He makes pendants, pins, bracelets, necklaces and sculptures.

Designs in Gold features a vast majority of Jim's own custom-designed sculptures in precious metals and gemstones, designs inspired by nature, assorted ethnic and eclectic work, his Irish and Scottish heritage, Celtic art and historic Japanese symbolism. He matches this inspiration with his interest in natural design to create unique looks for his pieces, a mix of styles making something new. Additionally, his pieces usually tell stories in their design.

Jim's excavation trips over the summer contribute to his attention to natural design. As he says, "I feel this ongoing interest reflects my attention to jewelry construction and the support structure of my designs; my passion for natural designs is constantly regenerated." Such passion is also seen in his sculpture work fabricating metal insects.

Jim is always moving forward and innovating, a few steps ahead of the competition. For example, he loves including moving pieces on his jewelry, which is no easy task. His necklaces have spinning parts inside and out, and his metal insects have moving heads or opening and closing pincers, something seldom seen and a level of precision many crafters aren't willing to achieve. Jim admits to sometimes staying the night in his workshop and working when he awakes in the morning.

He puts as much effort into the back of his work as he does the front, giving equal attention to both sides of design. This doesn't make them reversible; however, he points out, "My clients consider the back designs to be their secret."

Jim was surprised to find that over the course of his stay in the Valley, Designs in Gold has received 90 percent of its business from locals rather than tourists; however that doesn't stop people from coming from Orange County for his business.



Designs in Gold co-owner James Cleland examines a piece of merchandise. - Photo by Grant Harvey



Right: An inside view of Designs in Gold, located on Alisal Road in Solvang. - Courtesy Photo

Designs in Gold is a classy and unique Jewelry Dealer featuring unique and creative design work from a unique and creative mind, as well as countless other finds from all over the jewelry spectrum.

Jim and Ginger Cleland spoke with the Valley Journal about their company. Here's what else we learned:

Why did you start this business?

I started the business because of my fascination with geology, gemstones and precious metal, and my love for the history of antique jewelry.

What is your business background?

I have degrees in the bio-sciences and geology, and Ginger's degrees are in public relations and communications.

What is the best piece of business advice you have been given, and who gave it to you?

Biggest piece of business advice is, "Don't fall in love. Don't fall in love with your location, your employees, your stock – don't fall in love." – An old salesman from Carbondale, Ill.

What is the biggest challenge your business faces today?

Our biggest challenge is getting re-established as a fine jewelry store in the valley. Our reception in the community has exceeded our expectations. The attitude of the people to shop locally is refreshing.

What is the simplest thing you've never learned to do?

It's impossible to anticipate a changing business climate. We just deal with whatever is given to us.

What sets your business apart from your competitors'?

The estate jewelry gives us very unique merchandise, we have an in shop award-winning custom designer, and we buy gold and silver – which we have been doing so since the 1970s – so we have extensive knowledge of the product. These factors allow us to better serve our customers.

What books are on your bedside table?

I read classical sci-fi and science digest magazines.

Why did you choose to set up your business in the Valley?

For the past 20 years, we've been doing business in the Santa Ynez Valley. While visiting in 2008, a space became available in Frederick's Court, so we took advantage of that opportunity.

How could local elected officials make it easier for you to be successful?

Government and officials in general tend to not be a stimulant, but rather a hindrance, in a business. The best thing for businesses is always laissez-faire, which means to leave alone.

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Where do you see your business in five years?

In five years, I believe our business will be much stronger due to us serving a larger portion of the people in the Santa Ynez Valley and contributing more to the community.

Finally, what is on your to-do list?

Our to-do list is to continue our recognition as a fine art and estate jewelry dealer in the community, and to expand on our new design concepts.

Business name: Designs In Gold

Owner(s): Ginger & James Cleland

Business address: 485 Alisal Road

Business telephone: (805) 693-8700

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