





Elsiem Jewellery

*Working from her studio in Cambridge, Lorraine Hitt
creates elegant, timeless pieces of jewellery, inspired by
architecture and her love of minimal design.
Interview by Karen Jinks*



Who is Elsiem Jewellery?

I am, Lorraine Hitt, director, designer and jewellery maker. I create stylish, contemporary and simple forms using various materials and mediums.

Please tell us about your background; have you always been a jeweller?

No, but I've always been a designer spanning a few disciplines throughout my 28 year career.

I left school and trained as a graphic designer, obtaining a City & Guilds, and landed myself a placement at a small design studio where I became junior designer for a couple of years.

I then decided that 2D design wasn't enough for me so I expanded my training and later became designer and production manager at a signwriters, where I designed and applied vinyl cut and printed graphics to shop fronts/vehicles/signage/POS etc.

On the arrival of my son, I took a short time out of work then returned to college and gained a distinction in a National Diploma for Interior and 3D Design. Following my qualification, I started as a freelance conceptual visual designer and quickly progressed to an architectural interior designer, which led to being a partner in a small company, designing and project managing both commercial and residential projects nationally, specialising in bar and restaurant design.

However it was during my Diploma course, when I was awarded a silver award for my jewellery shop display and interior design two years consecutively, presented by The Goldsmiths' Company, which fuelled my passion for jewellery design - plus I always had a natural desire to hand craft, so the transition from my interior to my jewellery design business was an intuitive move.



**Do you have any formal training?**

Yes, in several design disciplines as mentioned before, which have all proved invaluable in all areas of building my jewellery business. Regarding jewellery making, I was taught metalsmith skills and techniques by a very experienced jeweller over a two-year period, and also self-taught and developed those vital skills in my workshop.

Your jewellery has a very strong, graphic style, what is the inspiration behind your designs?

I find myself naturally designing pieces that I would wear myself and I get inspired by small elements in other simple forms of architectural, product, graphic, and sculptural designs which I extract and develop in my own style. The material, medium and technique that I am experimenting with at the time, also influence my designs.

How important is good branding and photography in selling your items?

Imperative. Obviously any product needs to be photographed at its best; visual opulence sells most things but jewellery needs some special attention due to its reflective and small-scale detail. I've found that adding a lifestyle image helps enormously too, a person modelling your design always enables the customer to imagine them wearing it.

I've been on a steep learning curve with this skill and I'm still developing it now, as I'm not a trained photographer and not currently in a position to hire a professional every time I want to sell and promote. Also, I've learned that people like familiarity where branding is concerned, they generally need to trust and know the brand and the product behind the brand before investing





their money, so threading your image across all promotional platforms is important – albeit you may tweak and rebrand from time to time to keep it fresh.

Do you do commissioned work, if so what has been your most interesting request?

Yes and I welcome it if I feel my style of work will do their request justice. I've had some lovely commissions with enormous sentimentality attached. They include a lady's late husband's white gold wedding band, remodelled into a necklace; another was a late Grandmother's topaz set necklace remodelled into a contemporary silver necklace setting. Both customers were very

emotional when I presented the finished piece, which makes it all worthwhile for me.

My biggest challenge so far was to design and make a silver contemporary pendant setting for a large piece of Blue John, which is not only quite a rare stone but very fragile; the shape was awkward and to add to the pressure it was left to my customer by her late best friend. However, the result was, in fact, one of my best pieces of workmanship to date!

Please tell us about your workspace / studio.

Well until very recently I was working from my tiny spare bedroom at home in Cambridge, and frustratingly I grew out of it a long time ago. Finally,





within the last month, I expanded and moved into a large reception room in the house, which was formally used as a general dumping ground and had no purpose. I designed my space and my husband has kindly built a bespoke jeweller's bench and workspace. I love it, my 'woman's cave'.

What are your favourite tools of the trade?

Although it's a noisy, filthy job, I love using my polishers and compound - seeing the dull fire-stained metal shine and come to life gives me great satisfaction.

What does the term handmade mean to you?

Something handmade almost has the maker's identity ingrained. Their skill, passion, love and soul are in the piece. I think that's why I initially found it uncomfortable promoting and selling my designs, in fear of them being rejected which I felt was a personal rejection because it was part of me.

On the positive side of that though, when I've designed and handcrafted a commissioned piece for someone and received such an overwhelming emotional response, I felt so proud, valued,

appreciated, and connected to the customer in a way, and that is priceless to me.

Who or what is influencing you right now?

The same things that have always been an underlying influence, simplicity with a understated touch of something different, and always stylish!

Who are your favourite artists/designers?

From my studying days, I was drawn to Frank Lloyd Wright's designs, especially his architecture. For many years I have loved the work of Karim Rashid, and both his interior and product design has inspired my work. The work of both these designers is generally simple, clever forms, sometimes geometric and I guess quite masculine, which I emulate in my work.

I am in awe of a very current jewellery designer called Evgeniia Balashova. I love her 3D printed designs and she inspires me to want to venture into a similar technique in the near future.

Do you ever have creative blocks, if so how do you work through them?

Oh yes! Usually when I feel under pressure to produce something impressive for a particular



event/person/collection. I have a habit of convincing myself that whatever I design isn't quite impressive enough, so my creative mind shuts down. I usually overcome it by being inspired by other people's work and researching new jewellery components or findings which can sometimes spark an idea, and once I feel that I'm on to something exciting I can't put it down until I've perfected it.

What advice would you give someone looking to start a creative business?

There is a lot of advice I could offer based on my experiences, too many to mention - so if I had to choose one, it would be to never underestimate the power of networking with your fellow creatives, which in turn can also open doors with relevant non-creatives too. Also, helping and encouraging others, that goes along way.

What was the best advice someone ever gave to you?

You are your brand - so you have to believe in yourself in order for others to believe in your brand.



What are the most rewarding and most frustrating aspects to what you do?

As I mentioned before, the overwhelming response of a commission customer when you present the finished piece and seeing people wearing my designs, are very rewarding.

Frustrating is when I'm working on a new design in the workshop and I realise it's not going to work quite as I imagined and have spent many hours developing it and wasted materials. I appreciate this happens in most creative processes from time to time and mistakes have taught me lessons too, but gosh it's frustrating at the time.

If you had the chance to learn a new creative skill, what would it be?

CAD designing jewellery and 3D printing them - it's on my list to do!

**Describe your perfect day...**

It would start with an early morning walk with my dog, followed by a morning in my workshop designing and creating, then meeting some creative friends for a long, long lunch before returning home in time for the family to come together for a meal and a catch up of our day. Or alternatively a day being pampered in a spa!

What are your goals for the future?

I have quite a few smaller goals but apart from learning 3D printing, I'd like to have my designs in a few select retail outlets, that reflect my style of work, and maybe design and produce an exclusive range in a premium precious metal like gold.

Where can we see your work?

I have my own website www.elsiemjewellery.co.uk where some of my work is listed and I occasionally sell at local handmade events, but I also have an exclusive collection currently for sale in the shop at Kettles Yard, Cambridge, which is selling like hot cakes, keeping me busy re-stocking regularly.

For more information, visit:

www.elsiemjewellery.co.uk

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Images courtesy of Lorriane Hitt

