

Creative Living

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Strands of history

Beads form delicate, but direct, link to past

By Virginia Lee Clark
special writer

The italicized quotes are from Robert K. Liu's forward to "The History of Beads" by Lois Sherr Dublin.

"Beads were probably the first durable ornaments humans possessed."

THE OLDEST BEADS found thus far have been associated with the Neanderthal Man dating back to 38,000 B.C. and were excavated at an archeological site in La Quina, France. They were made of bones and animal teeth and worn as pendants.

We don't have to dig too far in our area to unearth what has to be the most complete selection of beads available anywhere in the country. They come from all parts of the globe and may be found in a number of shops.

Beads are more decorative than haubles. They represent social mores, portable wealth, politics, status symbols, trading power, monetary units, religious beliefs and superstitions.

And you thought beads were just items to string and wear around your neck.

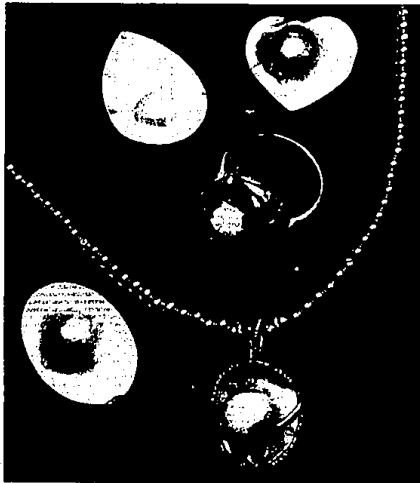
"Pleasing to look at and touch, colors and materials that almost compel one to handle them and sort them."

BEADS ARE microcosms of every art and craft form. They are made from different techniques using glass, wood, metal, ceramics, bone and natural materials such as stones (precious and semi-precious) and shells. They come in every semi-precious stone as well as coral and pearls. Let's not forget the shapes: round, molar, fluted, drop, ring, cone, lentil, cylindrical and many more.

Deciding which ones to use and putting the right ones together in order to design something pleasing is another whole discipline. Fortunately, there are local shops with knowledgeable owners who are ready to help.

Working with beads is something everyone can do regardless of experience or age. The results become a wearable art form.

"Today, beads are being combined and shaped into aesthetically



Pearls from an American pearl farm have an iridescent beauty that rivals those from foreign shores. The pendant, ring and earrings are from Shell or Bead It of Plymouth.

cally dynamic jewelry."

IDA JOYRICH and Ghinda Marich own Bead Works Inc. at 54751 Franklin Road in Franklin. They carry beads from all over the world as well as the material needed to make jewelry.

"We travel a lot independently of each other and everywhere we go we hunt for beads," Joyrich said. "It is a fascinating hobby as well as a business."

They have multi-colored Austrian crystals and tourmalines. Included in a large selection of stone beads are Nevada lapis and tree agate, which are new and just being mined.

There are handblown glass beads from China, with cats painted on the inside through the hole with a single-haired brush.

"Ethnic jewelry is popular right now, especially African. We carry a

good selection of beads from there made of all kinds of materials," Marich said.

THEIR PENDANTS are conversation pieces. One type, made of silver, is a toiletry cache disguised as jewelry with tiny grooming aids dangling from it. It is worn by nomads in Baluchistan.

"People buy our beads to be used for everything from architectural miniatures to dog collars," Joyrich said.

The Bead Works is open Tuesday through Saturday. The owners will help their customers design and make jewelry or make it for them.

"As was the case in so many ancient and tribal cultures, the ordinary is again being used in extraordinary ways by artists and craftsmen."

SHELL OR BEAD IT of Plymouth is owned and operated by the mother/daughter team of Helen Ferguson and Dana Wasson. They do a lot of custom designing, using "strictly natural stones," Wasson said.

"We specialize in weddings," She and her mother do a lot with cultured and freshwater pearls. In addition to running a mail-order service, Wasson said.

"Everybody's into the natural stones."

Many people bring in a family heirloom and ask to have a necklace designed using the old piece, she said. Shell or Bead It customers are interested in natural stones from black onyx, Austrian crystal, rose quartz, tiger's eye and lapis to pearls of all kinds.

THE ROYAL catfish is the logo at Beada Beada Inc. in north Royal Oak.

It is a mythological symbol whose movements are supposed to control earthquakes and thus pearl prices. High readings on the Richter scale play havoc with oyster beds.

Kris Castleberry and Beth Wilusz carry an array of cultured pearls from Japan and freshwater pearls from China in their store as part of a complete assortment of every type of bead imaginable.

They stock carnelian d'Alleppe made of red Venetian glass with a white core. Supposedly, \$24 worth of this particular bead bought Peter Minut the bargain of a lifetime — Manhattan Island.

Venetians were glass makers as well as aggressive traders and their beads are found worldwide.

Silver earrings produced by a cottage industry on Bali are a new item at Beada Beada. Each pair is special and many are set with garnets and amethysts.

BOTH Castleberry and Wilusz have strong feelings about the correct method to string beads.

"It is a real mathematical challenge. We feel it takes at least two years to train our personnel and five years until they are really qualified," Wilusz said.

The hole size varies with different



BILL DRESSLER/staff photographer

Helen Ferguson, owner of Shell or Bead It of Plymouth, models an American pearl pendant and ring. American cultured pearls are just starting to give those from other countries some serious competition.

beads. Because the proper weight string or cord should fill up the hole, beads that differ in hole diameters can't be used successfully together. The necklace simply won't hang right.

For example, lapis with very large holes cannot be strung with small-holed pearls. Flat surface beads don't work when placed side by side. They need a round bead between them to act as a ball joint.

CASTLEBERRY AND WILUSZ, as well as members of their staff, work with customers on a one-to-one basis in the selection and designing of their beads. They publish two monthly flyers, a smaller one for their retail customers and a larger one for their thriving mail-order business.

"Our inventory turns over about every six weeks," Castleberry said. To get on their mailing list, stop in their store at 4252 North Woodward just north of 13 1/2 Mile and fill out a form.

"... Beads are being made of materials and techniques that are in themselves expressing new artistic and technological dimensions."

A VISIT to a bead store in San Francisco and the encouragement of a young daughter inspired Arlene Green to open the Birmingham Bead Store 18 years ago.

The oldest bead store in the metro area, it is on the ground floor of the Great American Building, 280 North Woodward in downtown Birmingham, next door to Crowley's.

Because this shop is inside an office building with no windows, it depends on creative lighting to show

off its treasures. The result is dramatic, and the seductive sparkle and soft glimmer of the crystals, pearls and chalcodony draw one into the fascinating world of beadery.

"One facet of our business is catering to brides by helping them design jewelry for themselves and their wedding party," Green said. "We also carry a large inventory of decorative beads for application on wedding dresses and other clothing."

MANY WOMEN come in with items from their wardrobe so they can create coordinating pieces from the shop's diversified collection, Green said. Fishermen even buy beads for their lures.

The store offers sterling silver antique reproductions and bone beads that have replaced forbidden ivory.

Green and her daughter, Benita, an innovative designer in her own right, work closely with their customers. They offer a concise pamphlet called the Primer, which they wrote and illustrated, explaining some of the basics of stringing beads.

"Beads possess the desirable characteristics of every collectible: They are durable, portable, available in an infinite variety and often valuable..."

THE NEW KID on the block in bead stores is The Thomas Company, on the lower level of 742 North Woodward in Birmingham, two doors from The Claymore Shops.

The 18-year-old company is a large supplier of tools and equipment for metal smithing and jewelry making and handles both mail order and walk-in.

It began carrying beads three years ago. While its stock may be

smaller than that of other stores, it has a good selection of semi-precious stones, sterling silver, gold-filled, bone and lead crystal. It also carries cabachons.

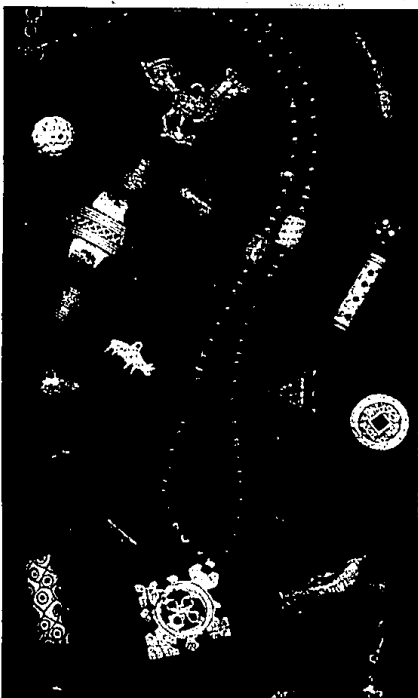
Thomas is the only store that offers classes. Besides regular sessions in metal smithing, it conducts one of two classes in bead stringing. Pam Eisen, one of the owners, also teaches pearl knotting and a bead class at the Birmingham Community Center.

"It is very gratifying to watch someone with a handicap or arthritis succeed in making jewelry. They begin by thinking they can't do it and are elated when they can," Eisen said.

The metal smithing classes meet for eight weeks at three-hour sessions and are offered day or evening. The business repairs jewelry, including soldering.

PUBLICATIONS ARE available to learn more about the world of beads including: "Ornament," a quarterly magazine published by Robert K. Liu; "The History of Beads," by Lois Sherr Dublin, Harry N. Abrams Inc. 1987, a large, coffee-table book filled with extraordinary photographs of beads and jewelry through the ages; "The Book of Beads," by Janet Coles and Robert Budwig, with many pictures and pages of design ideas and instruction methods.

The second annual bead conference is in Washington, D.C., this fall. There is definitely a tactile allure to beads as well as an appeal to all the senses. They represent history and different cultures and evoke a strong desire to learn more about their origins. They really are, as Liu said, "miniature bundles of secrets waiting to be revealed."



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

The Egyptian Coptic cross strung on jasper with turquoise is a stylish link to history. Around the necklace is a selection of beads from many countries of the world. The arrangement was done at Birmingham Bead Store.