

Weaving wonders

Dominique Toucheteau Making waves and winning awards, a French-born, Devon-based jeweller

At a small workstation, looking out across the rolling landscape of North Devon, Dominique Toucheteau sits weaving. But her craft is not what you might expect. Her material is gold wire, and the product of her intensive labour is an exquisite bracelet, whose organic shape is inspired by the meanderings of a Devon stream.

It is the latest piece in a stunning collection of original contemporary jewellery which is winning Dominique increasing acclaim in Devon, London and further afield. In 2011 she received a commendation in the 2011 Goldsmiths' Craft and Design Council Awards, and was selected to take part in the 'Origin' exhibition of contemporary crafts in London's Spitalfields.

French-born Dominique says she has always loved jewellery: "I liked to collect semi-precious stones as a child. One day, when I was about 12, I saw a pair of earrings in a shop which I couldn't afford so I decided to make some for myself." One of her first pieces was fashioned from the foil of a champagne bottle and two glass beads. She would go on to utilise anything she could find in and around her home town of La Rochelle – including copper wire (from her electrician father) and coloured glass found on the beach.

Dominique studied for a degree in sculpture in Bordeaux, where she developed her interest in the three-dimensional possibilities of wire and



Dominique at work.
Below: hematite and silver ring, £900; snake bracelet, £6,000; multi-layered bracelet, £1,000.

glass, before moving to London and returning to her first love. "I had no workshop in London to make big pieces so I decided to concentrate on jewellery," she explains.

She attended Morley College in Waterloo for two years under tutor Nuala

Jamison, where she learned some of the more technical aspects of jewellery, such as soldering and clasp-making. Today she continues to perfect her technique from her home near Umberleigh, creating two- and three-dimensional works of art in miniature.

Wire weaving excites Dominique for the endless possibilities it offers, and its ability to surprise with every twist and turn. "I start with an idea in my head, but the piece will often take on its own shape or direction," she reveals. "Each one triggers an idea for the next. It's a constantly evolving process."

Each design is woven around a silver or gold frame which, she says, gives it an unexpected strength and rigidity: "Because it is hand woven many people think that the jewellery will be very pliable to the touch, but because of the structure and the forces it is actually very strong. Customers are always surprised when they hold it."

While all her jewellery incorporates her signature weaving, the variety of Dominique's work is astonishing. It ranges from fine mesh earrings whose weave captures and reflect the light like diamante, to complex multi-layered bracelets incorporating up to eleven separate bands, individually woven and delicately stitched together in a way that ensures no two designs are ever the same. Many of her pieces incorporate semi-precious stones, and she is constantly developing ingenious new ways to set them. Her award-winning silver and hematite ring is hand-carved and seamlessly secured by a woven silver band.

Dominique takes her inspiration from nature; the ripple of sands left by an outgoing tide, the delicate skeleton of a decaying leaf, the surface texture of tree bark. But she is also a great admirer of Cartier: "Their jewellery is beautifully made, very classy and so elaborate in its construction." She could be describing her own collection.

www.dominiquetoucheteau.com



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