



NAG Member of the Month

In the first *Member of the Month* for 2013, Amy Oliver speaks to Carol Clarke-Ng of Designer Jewellery Ltd in Dublin. A member of the Institute of Registered Valuers and an alumni (Associate) member of the NAG Carol's journey through the jewellery trade has been an unusual and very interesting one...

How did you start in the jewellery trade?

I have always loved art, designing and painting, so I went to the College of Art here in Dublin with the aim of becoming a dress designer. However an apprenticeship fell through so I decided to follow my second biggest passion which was the Far East. I had 14 pen-friends in Thailand and so went to visit them all for four months.

However, as soon as I arrived I felt like I was at home and ended up staying for years. While there I taught English, and a lot of my students had jewellery factories so I became very interested in jewellery and gemstones. I ended up studying jewellery design at the Bangkok Jewellery Institute, gems at the Asian Institute of Gemmology, and trained as a goldsmith in a factory in Bangkok. Equipped with all this knowledge I designed my first collection of jewellery and decided to go home and marry my Chinese boyfriend who I had left waiting in Dublin.

You opened your own shop 25 years ago; what made you want to start your own business?

When I came home I showed my jewellery to all the retailers in Ireland and received a very negative response – too unusual, too weird, not commercial! So I decided to show my jewellery at fairs etc., to which I got the opposite response. The public liked it. I knew then that I would have to sell directly to the public and open my own shop if I

An example of Carol's recent work



wanted to design and make jewellery... so that's what I did. I'm also not good at taking orders so I knew I would have to work for myself and wanted to be free to use my own artistic talents.

Apart from your own work, what kind of products do you stock and why?

I used to design and make all my own gold and platinum jewellery, but found it was very slow going so I decided to buy in some jewellery to complement my own stock and to give a bit more variety. I tend to buy single unusual pieces.

I do not like brands as I think the market is saturated with them. Usually the brands dictate on everything from display to price, which I do not like. Also, many of the pieces are badly made and overpriced. Today it seems everyone from a footballer's wife to a singer is a 'jewellery designer' – mad when you think about it! I am an old fashioned jeweller but I believe there is still a niche for what I do so I buy lots of gemstones and spend the year designing and making up different pieces of jewellery. I love the more unusual stones. I feel there are too many people selling jewellery who actually know very little about what they are selling or how it is made. However, I would not mind being an agent for a good diamond ring company that wanted to set up in Ireland.

You are a member of the IRV; why did you decide to join?

Yes, I am very privileged to be the first Irish female to have been elected to the IRV. As with all I do, I like to do it to the best of my ability and to give my customers the best service that I can. I have always carried out valuations, but about five years ago I decided that I wanted to offer my customers a first-class valuation service, so I contacted the NAG and they put me in touch with the late Brian Dunn. Over the years I trained with Brian and I have to say that he was a



brilliant teacher. I loved his straight forward, down-to-earth logic and his desire to share his knowledge with people like me. I really miss him as a mentor and a friend. I also like the idea of being part of an organisation that strives for perfection and has so many experts in its midst. There are so many people doing bad jewellery valuations that I wanted to set myself apart from them.

Has being a member of the Institute enhanced your business?

Yes, I would say that being a member of the Institute has enhanced my business, although unfortunately in Ireland (unlike England), the insurance companies do not push their clients to furnish them with 'professional valuations'. This means there are numerous people doing very bad valuations, very cheaply, and I would not even try to begin to compete with them. So it is an uphill battle to try to get the insurance companies to change their ideas over here.

Finally, do you have a memorable moment from your time in the trade?

I remember back in the very early days when I knew nothing about gemstones I had a lovely three carat ruby that I paid quite a lot of money for. However, I was not mad about the colour and wanted it to be a little darker. I remember my Thai friends telling me about 'heat treatment', and I thought I could maybe do this in the microwave! So I put the ruby in and waited. The microwave started sparking and nearly blew up! I opened the door only to find my beautiful ruby splattered all around the sides of the microwave! Luckily for me it was just my ruby and not a customer's. Never try that at home. I guess the ruby had been glass filled and exploded.

If you would like your business to be considered as *Member of the Month*, write in and tell us why! Please send an email to: amyoliver@jewellers-online.org