



Karen Sarll

Dangle ring (handmade sterling silver ring with wire wrapped semi-precious beads) and Harmony bangle (handmade sterling silver beaten bangle with rose quartz, amethyst beads & silver clay heart)



Karen Sarll

If you ever doubted that beads could be an international language, then read on to learn more about Karen Sarll, a UK beader who made a big move to take beads to France.

Moving abroad, running your own business and working in the field of crafts are all risky endeavours so what type person would take on all three at once?

Can you tell us about your background?

I was born in North Yorkshire but moved to London aged about 4 and until 3 years ago had worked in London all my life.

I know your life has taken quite a different turn now, involving a big move to France. How did that come about?

My partner Tim and I set off for France about 3 years ago with our two cats and the dream of setting up jewellery making holidays. We had the idea of workshops that would give people a chance to try

lots of different types of jewellery making in beautiful, peaceful surroundings. When we stumbled on the Aveyron we knew we had found the right place: very undeveloped, quiet, and with hills that go on forever. We found a ruined 300 year old corps de ferme (small farm complex) with metre-thick walls and a courtyard, overlooking a beautiful valley. We set to work renovating it to provide accommodation and workshops. It has been very hard work carrying out all the renovations ourselves and we are still working on the accommodation but are running Christmas (2008) and New Year jewellery making breaks using a small family run hotel. We are starting a number of week long and shorter workshops in 2009 including our 'Introduction to jewellery making', 'Tiara & wedding jewellery' and 'Chainmail jewellery making'. We are both very excited about the workshops as the only

thing more satisfying than making a living doing something you enjoy is being able to pass on that pleasure on to others.

How are you earning a living before the workshops take off?

In the meantime we have a website selling sterling silver charms and findings, kits, tools and other jewellery making products. It has been slow getting started but we now have many return customers, which is so important.

How did you get into beading and jewellery making yourself?

I had always bought beads and really just strung them. Many years ago I did an evening class in silversmithing and was hooked. But then it seemed impossible to continue at home owing to the amount of equipment you need, and it was so much harder to find that equipment, so this was shelved for a number of years and I continued very basic beading. One day I read about brick stitch and found it fascinating, but I just couldn't get it to work (I was using cheap irregular seed beads); then I bought a brick stitch earring kit from an advert and it contained Miyuki Delicas. Suddenly everything fell into place, it was so



Above left: Silver flower charm bracelet (handmade sterling silver bracelet with silver clay flowers). Above right: Gumdrops charm bracelet (handmade sterling silver bracelet with glass beads)

satisfying and I was hooked – brick stitch is still my favourite stitch.

I am a huge buyer of jewellery making and beading books but I found Carol Wilcox Wells' book 'The Art & Elegance of Beadweaving' so helpful when I was learning new stitches, and my latest purchase, 'Creating Crystal Jewelry with Swarovski' by Laura McCabe, finally helped me conquer cabochon and rivoli bezelling.

Have you taken any other courses?

I have taken a number of courses: dichroic glass fusing, an instructor's course in PMC, an enamelling workshop,



Beaded Arrowhead earrings

a week's tiara making course and of course beading classes. I loved them all and each taught me at least one thing that was a revelation, made the entire course worthwhile and would otherwise have taken me forever to learn. Some examples are balling wire to make my own headpins, using liquid flux rather than borax, making my own catches and earwires, and many more. One of the most important benefits I have gained from taking classes is talking to other

students and sharing experiences.

Are there any pieces you've made that you're most proud of or that are 'uniquely you'?

My Latin rings, especially the barrelled one. Each one has a different Latin phrase, including 'I am not lost' in Latin (for men who won't stop for directions). Some pieces I am proud of because of the journey it took to be able to create them, the learning processes that you have to go through. I still have the first wire ring I made because it was the first time I soldered anything and that opened a whole new world to me.

What inspires your designs?

Some time ago Tim bought me a bangle with a simple beaten square dangle and it has lived on my worktable ever since as my inspiration for my silver work. It was everything I wanted to achieve: so simple, perfectly made and very touchable.

I love creating jewellery based on hearts (a recurring theme with many designers). I find myself returning to them again and again, but my favourite

piece is the simplest, my Full Moon pendant, which also appears on our logo. It feels wonderful and goes with everything.

My biggest aim when designing is creating something that is beautiful but also wearable; it should be comfortable and not make you feel as though it will break if you touch it. I think jewellery should look more and more organic as it is touched over time, worn by wearing so to speak.

I know you plan on setting up the workshops; have you done any teaching previously?

I spent the last five years before leaving the UK teaching specialised software, quite often to people who wanted to be elsewhere (certainly good practice for patience) and have casually taught beading and silversmithing to friends and holidaymakers. I get a huge pleasure in sharing the moment when something clicks and showing someone that it isn't hard and yes, they can do it, and when they rush back and show you something



Dichroic Glass charm bracelet (handmade sterling silver bracelet with fused & drilled dichroic glass pebbles)



Dangle rings (handmade sterling silver rings with Swarovski bicones and semi-precious beads)

they have made all by themselves, then you know you are responsible for another beading or jewellery making addict.

Can you describe for us where you do all your work?

At the moment I work at my desk in our bedroom. From my bedroom window I look down into a wooded valley and if I stand up I see the piles of stones that will become my workshop by next year and I can't wait. We'll have a room overlooking the valley for glass fusing, a workshop for silver and a large work room for beading.

Have you ever collaborated with anyone else?

My partner Tim worked as a designer in England for thirty years and for the past five has become fascinated with jewellery making. I taught him the basics of silversmithing and I find him a great inspiration in creating original designs.

Do you have any particular beading-related goals?

Our jewellery making holidays are goal number 1 and take up 90% of our time but in addition to this I would like to start producing our own charm and

finding designs. I love the prehistoric Venus figures that have been found all over Europe and want to include some of my own Venuses in our range. I would like to produce more kits as I am a great fan of kits myself and I love buying them (they are like a little present to yourself). I am experimenting with copper at the moment; with the price



Amethyst swirl earring (amethyst chunks on handmade sterling silver wires)

Above left: Rock crystal & Swarovski bracelet
Above right: Rose quartz bracelet (handmade sterling silver charm bracelet with lots of rose quartz beads and silver clay charms)

of silver shooting through the roof it is nice to be able to work with a material and not worry about the cost. I've been playing with copper and Swarovski Double AB crystals and they look surprisingly good together.

What do you think have been the biggest challenges you've had to face and what have been your biggest accomplishments?

My biggest challenge at the moment is learning French. Biggest accomplishment: raising the walls and replacing the roof of our house ourselves. We are well used to hearing 'Bonne courage' and 'Beaucoup de travaille' (lots of work), and so it is, but it is worth it.

Can you let us know more about the beading world in France?

Coming from London to France was a bit of a culture shock. Bead shops are few and far apart (our closest is Toulouse - 3 hours away) which is why we are gradually becoming a little bead shop ourselves. Thank goodness for the internet. A while ago here, there were lots of beading magazines full of stringing and Swarovski bling rings, but even these seem to have all disappeared and been replaced by scrapbooking. There are certainly dedicated bead makers in France but I think it must be so much harder for them as most books are in English. Beadweaving seems to be almost unknown (I have only seen Delicas once since I have been in France) but thanks to the magazines (in English) and the forums, beading certainly has its

SEEMORE

To see more of Karen's work, please visit her website www.lavidalerie.com