

Meet the maker: Jeweller Katheryn Leopoldseder



Hard at work: Katheryn Leopoldseder working on a ring in her Abbotsford Convent studio. *Photo: Penny Stephens*

By the age of seven, Katheryn Leopoldseder was mending jewellery with kitchen scissors. By nine or 10 she'd started making beads using old pliers she found in her Mt Eliza garage. By age 12 she'd launched a jewellery label with a friend and was selling her wares at local school fetes and markets such as Mornington and Caribbean Gardens.

Living with a once-creative mum now suffering from a chronic illness, Leopoldseder learned early on to be independent and entrepreneurial. "On one occasion I actually carried my trestle table to the bus stop to go and sell my – I think we called ourselves – 'Jazzy Jewellery'," she recalls with a laugh. "I used to get around everywhere with a huge fishing tackle box full of beads."

Leopoldseder's drive and talent were evident to her high school metalwork teacher, who not only bought Jazzy Jewellery for his wife and attended all her subsequent exhibitions, but also arranged a two-week stint at RMIT's Gold and Silversmithing course. Leopoldseder was hooked. At 17 she moved to Melbourne and enrolled in the course, despite some misgivings about narrowing her focus. "I didn't want to just make jewellery," she says. "I felt like there is so much out there, I want to play with all sorts of things. But then what I found with the course is if you can learn how to work with materials ... and how to design, that can go anywhere."



One of Katheryn's bangle designs. *Photo: Penny Stephens*

After graduating in 2001, she worked for the late Vivian Endean at The Ring in Chapel Street and Sarah Rossat Studio Ingot in Fitzroy, from whom she learned many of the skills required to build a contemporary jewellery practice of her own. Other mentors include jewellery curator Kevin Murray, fellow designer Marian Hosking and the myriad makers who call The Abbotsford Convent home. It's from here that Leopoldseder creates the exquisitely delicate contemporary jewellery that's built her international reputation as one of Australia's finest designers. Side projects include lighting design and art installations.

Given the time-consuming nature of jewellery making, it's not surprising to learn Leopoldseder finds her craft exhausting as well as inspiring. "When you make contemporary jewellery it is all about the story and the relationship, either between you and who's buying it or between who's buying it and who they're giving it to," she says. "That can be quite exhausting in the sense that as a maker you are constantly exposing yourself and putting yourself out there on behalf of people that are making a gesture between one another. So sometimes it's kind of love-hate. But then when you nail it, it's fantastic."