

Buttoned Up



Over the years I have written on many occasions about designs and the inspirations behind them. This month I am going to look at inspiration from a different angle by telling you about the young Irish goldsmith Elaine-Sarah Comerford.



Elaine-Sarah

I first came across Elaine-Sarah last year when I was visiting an exhibition in London and was so struck by her that I knew I just had to include her work in our collection.

Elaine-Sarah from Dunhill in County Waterford was trained at the Crafts Council of Ireland in Kilkenny. She came up with the concept and design for her unique range from her mother's old button tin. Looking at the buttons she was reminded of when she was a little girl. She would watch her mother sewing and laying out patterns and she would play with the buttons, picking out the ones she wanted for her dresses. As she outgrew them, her mother Anne would cut the buttons off and store them in her tin as reminders.

Elaine-Sarah, inspired by the memories that related to those buttons, created a collection of jewellery that would represent people's memories. She named it the "Memory Bracelet" and focused on handmade individually designed buttons, made in silver or gold which are threaded onto silver chain. The bit I love is the silver or gold needle which threads through the last Button can, if you want, be used as a clasp. The buttons are priced from £40



and can be customized by the addition of adding small diamonds or pink and blue sapphires and there is enough space to personalize your own button with engraving too.

In 2009 Elaine-Sarah wanted to grow her business so brought the idea into the Irish Dragons Den, where she received great interest from three of the dragons and finally opted for an offer from one of them.

At this stage I feel it is best for Elaine-Sarah to tell her story in her own words and although I have never interviewed a designer like this before, she agreed to give it a go



Do you have a favourite button and why?

Ohh that's like asking do you have a favourite child!! All of the pieces are like my babies, I design from the heart all the time and each piece just makes me love the whole collection more and more because it's been part of my life for so long now. I have a favourite Combination though: it's the two-tone Silver and Gold bracelet with the diamonds in it. I like the texture the different buttons give the bracelet and I love two-tone because you can wear it with anything.

Is it possible to set stones other than diamonds and sapphires onto the button, for example a birthstone?

Not at the moment. We prefer to use Diamonds and Sapphires because they are 9 and 10 on Mohs scale, because this is a piece of jewellery that will last for life and we want the stones to be of the same quality. We can heat and repair a piece when it's a diamond or sapphire and there will be no damage to the stone, but if we were to use birthstones for example some can't be heated or cleaned. We do however have some gemstone charms that can be clipped on to the bracelet for added colour, but they can be removed when cleaning or servicing a piece.



With reference to your Dragons Den experience, you mentioned to me that you really enjoyed the experience and would do it again?

I would really enjoy doing it again. I'm not sure you are allowed to go on more than once though. The thing is I don't see myself as a good sales person when it comes to interacting with the public, but I am so passionate about what I do it's easy to promote my business on the whole. I love what I do and I think because it comes from my heart I was able to go into great details, which was great when pitching for investors.

What is it like setting up and running your own business?

My company is becoming very much a family business. No one in my family is self employed, but we were all very enterprising when it came to creativity and ideas. I trained on this prestigious course to become

a goldsmith, but my family have always been helping me achieve my dream. The concept born from my Mother's influence (the button tin) has now been handled by nearly all of us. My Dad shoots waxes for us and has a natural ability with his hands and great

attention to detail. My Brother, who was a plumber, lost his job in the recession which in turn led to him losing his house and everything. He is the one who volunteered to help me set up the workshop and get the business running and has now been accepted into the same course I did 9 years ago. Some of the newest designs are his ideas and it's great to think that he found a new path because of helping me. My Niece, who's only 12, loves to come down and re-organise the office and she's actually good at it! She told me one day that it's a more important job than making jewellery, so that's what she wants to work at in the future!

LOL! My in laws sat one night before a big show putting ribbons on bags and brochures. My family are a huge support. They've helped out with shows, delivered to stores. It's very much a cottage industry that we are turning into a big business and hopefully it will continue to grow at the same pace.

Elaine-Sarah's enthusiasm for her craft is infectious and she is constantly creating new buttons to add to the collection,

as well as expanding the concept as a whole. Having met Elaine-Sarah and seen her work, I am hooked! I think it is a truly wonderful idea and it is a concept inspired by tradition that perhaps we can all relate to. My own button box will never be the same again!

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