

## Karen Green



Karen Green's grandfather was influential in focusing her creativity within the realm of handmade jewelry. Trained in Paris, he was an avant-garde designer who mixed materials such as wood and precious metals in his designs at a time when no one was doing that. Karen recalls a diamond pinky ring incorporating ebony, and art nouveau frames of pounded silver and mixed metals. She remembers being at his jeweler's bench in his shop in Wilmington, Delaware and having her curiosity piqued as he repaired watches and worked on jewelry pieces. She feels a cosmic connection with him, even though he died when she was only 11.



Karen always made things for herself and for family. During a period of high unemployment 20 years ago, Karen began making jewelry with watch parts. (Her mother also was in retail and a craftsperson; it was her mother who first used watch faces in unusual ways.) She would get watch parts in bulk, and then replace the dial with an old portrait photo from the 19th century to make a photo pin. Sometimes she would get commissions to create wedding pins and other customized items.

Twenty years ago, items made from recycled watch parts were less common than they have become: now, “steam punk” is a style most people have heard of, and fake watch gears can be purchased at craft and bead stores. But Karen’s intricate constructions, earring and pins made of genuine watch parts and other bits have been an attraction in the Shelburne gallery for the last decade. They have the authenticity of genuine parts and original design— perhaps some cosmic flair passed down to her from her grandfather.



Karen says she is always “searching for the next thing that will make me feel alive” in terms of craft. Sometimes it just depends on what comes her way, like the basketful of button samples someone once gave her. She made dozens of button bracelets by sewing a bunch on wide elastic; these were all gifts for friends.

Her latest designs incorporate sea glass and wire wrapping, something that grew out of beach foraging on Prince Edward Island where she has a vacation home. She makes mobiles, key chains, collages and other items from sticks and stones and glass tumbled by the sea. There is an annual sea glass festival on the island, and she saw some upscale jewelry utilizing the glass that inspired her, so she took a wire wrapping class. Since it is virtually impossible to find matching glass pieces on the beach, or pieces that are fun colors instead of brown, green and clear, she hunted down a source on Etsy. The pieces she uses are recycled glass and are tumbled for the frosted effect and come in many different sizes, shapes and colors.

She likes having a craft “she can do by her wood stove in the morning.” Her career is early childhood education. She administers a district wide, grant funded program for the Union 38 school system that involves a playgroup and parent education for 0-5 year old children and their families. Recently she feels that funding has become more secure for such programs due to findings from research on brain development that

supports the value of such programs. She has held that position for 15



years.

Karen came from the Boston area 30 years ago to settle in Shelburne Falls, where she has stayed put since. “I’m glad it’s remained a human, caring, nurturing community. Here, there’s still a good mixture of folks—not like Noho. I feel like I love it more every year.” She started out selling her jewelry at the Salmon Falls gallery, then after ten years moved across the river to the Coop. “I’m just a co-op kind of person!. I’ve always wanted to come here, it just really embodies the spirit of the arts.”

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