

Jane Savage



The coop's newest silversmith, jeweler Jane Savage, is a Valley native. Born and raised in North Amherst, she spent time in Maryland and Georgetown before returning and settling in the Northampton area. Her current home in the Market Street neighborhood is within walking distance of downtown and contains her home studio as part of her second floor apartment. Jane's son, an aspiring film maker, lives downstairs.

Jane learned her craft in the early 1970s by taking classes when she was in Maryland. And her studio holds a lifetime of equipment; this is a craft whose tools never become outdated. A large section of tree trunk sits in the middle of the floor and holds several mandrels for shaping metal.. Around the outside of the trunk are loops of leather holding tools. "A lot of my work is hammered. You either have wire, or sheet, to work with. Wire comes in round, triangle, square...They sell some sheet pre-engraved with little flowers and stuff, but I think it is pretty tacky." Also in the studio is her

torch, rotary flex shaft tool, crock pots holding her acid baths for quenching, and several



workbenches.

Jane showed me a lovely silver bracelet and earrings, very simple lines with a smooth, mirror like finish. How long does it take to finish a bracelet like that? “The metal is fairly hard, so you have to keep annealing it—heating it up and quenching it to shape it—which results in fire scale, which then has to be removed,” she explained.

She held out an item to show me what the fire scale looked like. I peered at the surface and thought I saw a slightly darker, cloudy patch on it. “Sometimes it takes just the right light to see it.” She takes it off with a brush, and then buffs the surface to a mirror finish. “Some people tumble the jewelry in steel shot, but I hate it. I tried it and it leaves little pits and I feel I have to polish it anyway, the shine looks like tin foil to me.” The buffing machine can burn the hands with its spinning wheel, and takes up more floor space than any other equipment. When she turns it on, the air is filled with the thick hum of the machine’s motor. With all the hand work involved, she estimates the bracelet to take about four hours.



A new design she is playing around with is something she likes to call “After the Flood.” These pendants are made with molten silver poured so that it free-forms over a prepared surface that results in a random blob that contains a honeycomb effect within it. She likens it to a “ravaged earth,” a concept inspired by the *Before the Flood*

documentary about climate change. Within this abstract matrix of silver, she affixes a small ball of 14



carat gold, which symbolizes hope.

Jane has been a fixture in downtown Northampton for many years, as the owner of the Ultra Gal and Fantasy Closet shop on Main Street. She sold women's clothing, accessories, jewelry, vintage items, wigs and costumes and more on what ended up being three floors near the popular Thornes market. It was the kind of place where people enjoyed transforming themselves with wigs and masks and putting together wild ensembles and having fun. Jane for the most part enjoyed her long run as shopkeeper, but also grew tired of "being there" selling things to people. When she needed a double knee replacement in 2012, she decided to close the store and concentrate on healing from her surgery and taking care of her father, then 97 years old.



Like many creative people, she keeps going in her craft as a supplemental income and because it is who she is: a Maker. She is happy to have the new outlet for her jewelry at the cooperative gallery and doesn't think she will be going back to the craft fair circuit, with its demanding schedule of putting up and breaking down booths and fixtures.

Jane showed me a weird but fantastic original painting in her son's apartment that she said he found on the side of one of the town's streets. Whoa—amazing scavenging in Noho! I only mention this because as soon as I drove away from her building I noticed a pile of empty wooden picture frames on the sidewalk in front her neighbor's house, obviously set out for anyone to take away. Which I did!