



The cleaner, the goldsmith, and the shopkeeper

Parris Bambery meets goldsmith Dorthe Kristensen in her Aro Valley Jewellery store, **Vilders**. Photos also by Parris

Goldsmith artist Dorthe (pronounced "daughter") Kristensen has come a long way since selling her jewellery at Camden Market in London. At 17, fresh from Denmark and unable to speak English, she worked as an au pair before studying jewellery and design for three years at the Sir John Cass School of Art.

She started selling her own jewellery at the eccentric Camden Market as a way to supplement her studies. When she returned to Denmark five years later she completed a three-year apprenticeship in Copenhagen and graduated as a goldsmith in 1998.

Fast forward ten years and Dorthe is now settled in the charming Wellington suburb of Aro Valley with her Rarotongan partner and two children. She's been teaching her popular jewellery workshops for eight years, and running a gallery at the front of her workshop for two.

Her jewellery is handmade from gold, silver, precious and semiprecious stones and is something unique: a definite steer-clear of anything mainstream. It's rare these days to see jewellery of such honesty and expression: the textures, colors and formations are all very organic and you can almost see the blood, sweat and tears she's poured into creating each piece.

Upon meeting Dorthe you come to realize that her jewellery is much like herself – maybe it's that frank and forward streak that many Danes possess. "It's all very well making contemporary jewellery, but you have to have the quality behind you, it's important to retain the discipline," she says.

Dorthe knew exactly what she wanted to do from a young age. Early on it was her blacksmith father that influenced her decision to become a goldsmith. For the last eighteen years she's worked incredibly hard, continually improving and developing new ideas. "As much as it is

about making a living, it's the continual development as an artist," she says. So much so that she exhibits something new each week at her Aro Valley gallery 'Vilders'.

"My shop allows people off the street to buy something handmade without it being extremely expensive," says Dorthe – and it's not an intimidating place, it's just her at the shop where she'll often sit out front, pottering away making her jewellery, "I'm the cleaner, the goldsmith, and the shopkeeper," she laughs, "but it's good because you get that immediate contact with people."

Vilders is open on a Friday and Saturday, and by appointment. You can buy straight from the gallery or design your own piece of jewellery by picking and choosing what you like and having Dorthe make it especially. Vilders also offers the chance to recycle old jewellery, perhaps something that was inherited, by re-melting it down and giving it a new life. "That way you still keep the sentimental value of the jewellery," says Dorthe.

Her morning and night workshops, held at the back of her gallery, run for six weeks with a class of eight. During the workshop you can expect to make a silver ring, then three to four pieces, whether a ring, necklace or brooch of your own design.

Vilders Contemporary Gallery

104 Aro Street

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www.vildersgallery.co.nz

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