

Doctor of Adornment

Exploring the creative process behind Stephanie Lake's statement jewelry.

BY MARY O'REGAN

Jewelry designer Stephanie Lake describes her design process as "like working in an archeological site consisting of long-forgotten jewels." Using the aesthetic know-how she gained through a Ph.D. in decorative arts, design history and material culture, Lake scours antique stores, estate sales and auctions for luxurious elements such as glass beads, antique gems, gold tassels and exotic stones. Then, through myriad construction techniques—weaving chains, bonding stones, braiding leather and joining links—she creates bold yet elegant statement jewelry.

"I strip everything of its original context to create work that has a timeless sensibility," Lake explains. This means she'll take things like amethyst nuggets, Scandinavian lobster napkin rings and 18th-century fabric trimmings and, guided only by her intuition, piece together a necklace, bracelet or earrings. "In many cases these elements weren't designed for personal adornment," she says, "And none of them were meant to meet, let alone 'get along.'"

Lake's designs are easily recognizable as hers—few designers are able to unearth such one-of-a-kind treasures as a brass Tibetan pendant, 19th-century Indian sterling chain and an Austrian starburst from the 1950s. "You need two things to wear my designs," she says. "Confidence and a dash of nonchalance."

As one of a handful of doctorates in her field, Lake has traveled everywhere from Paris to Tokyo researching fashion and interior design collections from the 18th century to today. She spent two years as a research consultant at Sotheby's in New York and, while studying for her M.A. at the Bard Graduate Center (where she also earned her Ph.D.), found a mentor in renowned sportswear designer Bonnie Cashin, who developed Coach's original women's handbag line. After Cashin's death in 2000, Lake published a feature about their friendship in *The New York Times Magazine*, curated a retrospective on the designer at FIT and established The Bonnie Cashin Foundation.

Based in Minnetonka with her husband, Cory, owner of American Guitar & Band, Lake specializes in interior design in addition to jewelry. Her split-level rambler, which has received almost as much press as her accessories, is full of sleek,



modern furniture, sculptures from around the world, and sketches, décor and clothing from Cashin's Manhattan apartment.

"Whether it's putting together a room, an outfit or a piece of jewelry, the same approach

applies: everything starts with the search for exquisite pieces and ends with the creation of an unexpected composition," she says. "There's a recognizable 'Stephanie Lake' aesthetic in everything I design." +

PHOTOS: KELLY LOVERUD



Working out of her Minnetonka home, Stephanie Lake crafts opulent jewelry from unexpected sources.