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AT THE BENCH

Quality Craftsmanship

Texas Rocks

Crafting a line of locally inspired jewelry

BY SUSAN EISEN A native of El Paso, Texas, I have grown to love the Franklin Mountains that surround my city. While attending the University of Texas at El Paso's Art Metals Program, I admired the mountains each morning on my way to class. Today I have a view of the mountains from my retail jewelry store.

Although I have been a retail jeweler for 31 years, it wasn't until several years ago that I began making gifts and jewelry representative of the city of El Paso. It's been a very fulfilling endeavor for me, and I have received such a positive response from the buyers and recipients of these locally inspired gifts that I continue to expand my collections. Recently, fueled by the beauty of the Franklin Mountains, I decided to make

a line of jewelry using the shapes of some rocks that I found in the mountains. The following is a summary of the process that I used to create these organic looking pieces:

- I began by pressing the rocks into flexible clay to mold their unique textures—the sharp and rounded edges around the sides and the various unique planes formed by nature. I heated up



some leftover pieces of blue wax, sprayed the molds with mold release, poured the molten wax inside, and put the molds in the freezer to harden the wax.

- Once the waxes hardened, I began the design process, cutting them into different shapes and sizes that enabled me to compose the designs. I also scooped out the backs of the wax rocks to minimize the amount of gold necessary to cast them.

- Using recycled gold, I cast the pieces, which came out looking just like gold nuggets.

- I then designed a series of one-of-a-kind pendants for the collection, soldering the gold rocks to various pieces of hammered gold wire and sheet. The



one commonality in each piece is a diamond embedded in the gold rock, symbolizing the star on the mountain that is lit nightly in honor of or in memory of someone in El Paso.

The collection has since grown to include rings, earrings, bangles, and brooches. There is no end to the design elements contained within these rocks. And, upon hearing the story of how this collection was born, my customers have just as much enthusiasm for it as I do because it gives extra meaning to the jewelry they are wearing. ♦

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