

A portrait of Claire Vessot, a woman with long, wavy brown hair, wearing a black top and blue jeans. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. She is wearing large hoop earrings, a watch on her left wrist, and a wide, textured silver cuff bracelet on her right wrist. The background is dark.

Designer Profile

Branching Out

Award-winner Claire Vessot is still making discoveries about the design process

by Sarah B. Hood



FOR MONTREAL-BASED DESIGNER CLAIRE VESSOT, the creative process is elusive and intangible, but never static; it also seems to thrive best in collaborations. “All the comments, any collaborative input towards the finished piece, team spirit: I believe all that translates into the finished project,” she says.

Perhaps best known for her work with PAJ, where she worked for 16 years (notably as the creative lead for the Elle Jewelry line) she has received 20 industry awards. The most recent of these is Canadian Jeweller’s Editors’ Choice (2nd Place, 2015) for her work with Beverly Hills Jewellers. She has also been recognized at the JCK Jeweller’s Choice Awards and the AGTA Spectrum Awards, among others.

Although she could certainly be considered a veteran, Vessot says she’s still making new discoveries about the nature of creativity and her own strengths, especially as she’s been exploring the freelance world over the past 18 months. “Being with a company as long as I had been, I had the luxury of working with the input from the Canada team—Mary Milan and her team,” she says. “That was an incredible way to work.”

By contrast, as a freelancer, “I’m out of the environment that’s got this incredible structure and on my own doing different projects with different materials and stones. It taught me what comes naturally and what was a struggle.”

Freelancing brought Vessot to a realization that was both simple and profound: “If I could tell anybody anything, it would be ‘learn what you’re good at and stick with it.’” In her own case, Vessot says she often found herself overflowing with ideas when she was called on to design one custom piece, but was unable to use the extra designs because doing so would have undermined the exclusivity of the commissioned piece.

“My ideas are not singular; I’ll do three pieces, not one,” she says. “I realized ‘Claire, you do collections!’ It allowed me to specialize as brand and collections. Becoming a brand specialist is really rewarding on many levels. When I meet with a client and they have a need for collections or a brand, what I find really fascinating is they’re asking for something that they want: it exists somewhere, but it’s up to me to bring it to life.”

Let to right: ELLE Jewelry Essentials cushion lever back earrings with tanzanite CZ, Julianna B Duchesse Collection rose gold over silver ring with black onyx and diamonds, Julianna B Duchesse Collection bangle in sterling silver/rhodium with purple chalcedony, Julianna B Just Because Collection rose gold over sterling silver cuff with lace motif



Top to bottom: Julianna B Just Because Collection 18k gold over silver cuff with diamond pave/rhodium, Julianna B Joy ring in 14k with blue topaz and diamonds, ELLE Jewelry by Vessot Corset cuff in sterling silver with gunmetal and satin ribbon tie, Beverly Hills Jewellers Honey Swirls 14k gold ring with genuine Swarovski topaz stones and Canadian diamond, Julianna B Duchesse rose gold over silver bangles with black onyx and diamonds

Vessot says she finds her style range has changed a lot as a freelancer. "With Elle it was sleek silver. For Beverly Hills Jewellers, their designs run from very classical diamond pieces to swirling gold with coloured stones. But it's always a sharing of ideas, and that's what I really love most about doing brand and collections."

She embraces the digital world: "I've always worked with my own style, where I sketch and scan and manipulate in Photoshop, because I like a drawing that has sketch warmth to it. They don't have to be perfect renderings; they just have to have the right shape and feeling," she says.

She finds it difficult to describe where her inspirations come from. "It's always different; sometimes I will just jump in and start sketching with shapes, depending on what the clients want," she says. "Then the ideas start sharing. It evolves; it's kind of an intangible process."

She has developed a term ("splitting") for a process she's learned that involves looking at the initial concept like the trunk of a tree, and allowing it to build and branch out into new, related ideas. "The splitting is where one seed branches out into many styles within a range," she says. "It's not uncommon for me, when I'm asked to come up with three, to come up with ten."

Without intending to, Vessot says she's "carved out a valuable niche in the jewellery industry." She recently launched a collection for Beverly Hills Jewellers at JCK and is collaborating with Julianna B ("a mother-and-daughter team, one of the largest Internet suppliers"). She promises there will also be Vessot Collections in the near future.

"For me, it's about sharing and inspiring passion in others," Vessot says. "I really do believe that if you follow what comes to you that's right for you, then it will lead you in the right way." CJ