



BY MARY SHUSTACK / OCTOBER 2016 / SEPTEMBER 30, 2016

QUIRKY COOL



In Peekskill, a city noted for its wealth of artistic talent, Jeorjia Shea manages to stand out.

And that says quite a bit about the artist, designer and entrepreneur.

Shea is the personable personality behind Quirkshop, which, as its Division Street sign proclaims, is an artisan boutique and workshop.

Walk into the slip of a space for a unique retail experience. Its bleached wood floors and exposed-brick walls serve as the understated backdrop to a mix of one-of-a-kind work.

There are dresses and coats, scarves and hats, bags and jewelry, artwork and organic skin care products.

A theme runs through what's on display — a clear devotion to handcrafted goods, along with a side order of vintage — that ties it all together in a most artful way.

Shea, who grew up in Bergen County, N.J., traveled to the West Coast — where she lived for a time in a converted school bus — before eventually returning East and landing in Peekskill.

A longtime artist who transitioned into clothing design, she was selling her work at craft fairs, markets and online but wanted something more, which she found in her first brick-and-mortar venture.

"I had no idea what I was doing, but I knew I had to do it," she says of the effort that celebrated its first anniversary in August.

That earlier work had led Shea to meet and build relationships with fellow artists, many of whom she called on to join her at Quirkshop.

And like Shea, many of the artists at Quirkshop are self-taught creators who use alternative and up-cycled materials to craft one-of-a-kind work.

For Shea, it's always been her way.

"I always felt like I had to create," she says. "I don't feel right if I'm not doing something every day."

Having a mother who was really into antiques, Shea says, "There were always interesting, odd things around."

And Shea began to paint on vintage boxes, which eventually bloomed into so much more.

At Quirkshop, Shea's own work is integral to the mix.

She began sewing in her early 20s and is now known for her one-of-a-kind repurposed cashmere coats, hoodies, dresses and skirts, along with her ever-popular cashmere fingerless gloves ("You know, hands-free for texting," she says. "They're super soft."). Some designs, which are also crafted in cotton and other natural materials, feature her painting on fabric as well.

Using recycled materials keeps the process challenging and the results unique.

And Shea relishes the fact that her customers are also those of individual spirit — and taste.

"It's really not very young girls," she says. Her customers are "past the point where they need to look like everyone else."

There's little chance of that happening at Quirkshop, where artists are selected for their unique visions. Shea, almost reluctantly, will point to a few key players from among the 50 she features.

Her best-selling artists include Jay Girl Designs from Elizabeth Jay. Shea says Jay creates "everything from intricate beaded jewelry to really funky clothes and bags for the artsy mature woman. Kind of Eileen Fisher meets Bjork." Shea also points to Adrienne Butvinik of Catmaid, who creates hand-dyed organic cotton tops, dresses and scarves.

She also credits Mary Helen Davis of Fugitive Threads, who Shea says "specializes in masterful knitting. She also does up-cycled work, is kind of my right-hand woman and often is the one I turn to when there is a super technical sewing issue."

As she glances around the shop's selections, Shea notes that supporting local artists is also important.

"Pretty much everything is made by someone who's in New York."

For Shea, days are a busy mix of creative and more business-oriented duties. One moment she might be working at her industrial sewing machine set right within the store — a workshop space that keeps the creative process in plain view — but the next will have to deal with more mundane business decisions.

"That's the hardest part, running the business and making all the stuff," she says, but notes she wants to always be changing, exploring and moving forward.

Shea says she plans to expand her offerings for men and her online shopping options and also conduct more workshops for those interested in sewing — or creating in general.

"My purpose here is definitely to sell things, but it's more than that. I really want to inspire people, make them feel they can always do something... Part of my mission is just to help people create the life they really want, doing what they love is really important."

Quirkshop is at 23 N. Division St. in Peekskill. For more, visit quirkshoppeekskill.com.

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Mary Shustack

A career journalist, Mary Shustack has been writing features for WAG since 2011. A graduate of the University of Missouri-Columbia, her previous experience includes more than 20 years with the Gannett company.