

The making of a *master*

Diane Fitzgerald built a beading and teaching career from the ground up.

by **Barbara A. McGuire**

The ginkgo leaf is a popular theme for Diane, and each new interpretation results in a sold-out class. Photo by Diane Fitzgerald.

Diane Fitzgerald is no stranger to accomplishment. Her list of credentials is inspiring even at first glance — she is the founder and past president of the Upper Midwest Bead Society; has taught at the Bead&Button Show since 2000, including the 2007 Master Class “The Jewels of Miriam Haskell;” and has traveled to 38 countries, learning about beads and beadwork. This year, *Bead&Button*

magazine selected Diane as the recipient of the 2008 Excellence in Bead Artistry Award, to be presented during the Bead Social and Auction at the 2008 Bead&Button Show.

But to truly know the depth of Diane’s success is to know the heart of a seeker. Her quest has led her to a place where her life’s work is full of brilliant colors, shapes, textures, and beauty. But how exactly does one become a “master seed beader”?

Eclectic interests led eventually to beads

Journalism was one of Diane’s first loves, and she holds a graduate degree in mass communication from the University of Minnesota with a minor in design. She is also mathematically inclined. “Geometry and math don’t scare me,” she admits. On the contrary, she is drawn to organization, rhythm, symmetry, balance, and counting.

In addition to a 20-year career in public relations, Diane pursued needle-



Left: In a Japanese department store, Diane is robed in a full kimono. Photo by Jeannette Cook.

Below: Diane admires Berber beads and jewelry in a bead store in Marrakech, Morocco. Photo by Michael Malloy.

Right: Diane's *Braided Garland Necklace* unites vintage German glass flowers with contemporary resin flowers and leaves. Photo by Diane Fitzgerald.



point, especially Oriental rug designs, and quilting. Next came an interest in beads, and Diane took classes with some of the best teachers around, starting with Helen Banes.

"It was the weekend that changed my life," Diane reminisces about Helen's class on needlewoven necklaces. "I saw an opportunity."

Classes with Horace Goodhue converted Diane to seed beads, followed by classes with Virginia Blakelock and Carol Perrenoud, Marcy Stone, Joyce Scott, and David Chatt.

In 1989, Diane began to design beadwork. She says, "I had a chance to buy an inventory of beads from someone who had been making jewelry and selling to women's clothing stores locally. My husband loaned me \$11,000, and we hauled the beads home in the trunk of our car. It's been a love affair ever since."

In 1995, Diane was invited to be a contributing editor for *Bead&Button*, and she began to teach bead stitching. She collaborated with her former teacher, Helen Banes, to write *Beads and Threads*. This was the turning point when Diane fully embraced beading as her work.

A commitment to teaching

Looking back, Diane feels that teaching has been the focus of her career. Donna Stephens, owner of On the Rocks bead store in Hamilton Mill, Ga., in the U.S., took Diane's class for teachers at last year's Bead&Button Show.

"Diane is effective as a teacher because she is comfortable to be with, unpretentious, attentive, and good at listening," Donna says. "She personalizes the class and draws the students into her realm, calling each student by first name, and familiarizing herself with the student's background."

Diane's students come away with more than just technical information. Diane realizes that choices are personal, and her intention is not to create a following, but to inspire students to find their own artistic voices.

She shares a secret for inspiration: "Reward yourself by taking a class not directly related to beading but influential

to beading choices or development. It could be anything: basketry, fiber weaving, needle embroidery, or color theory."

Diane also teaches bead stitching through step-by-step instructions in her books, and she stresses the importance of presenting directions realistically to help students achieve accurate results.

Diane has written nine books (the 10th is on its way), beginning in 1993 with *Contemporary Beadwork I: Counted and Charted Patterns for Peyote Stitch*, and, most recently, *Zulu Inspired Beadwork*. Diane's books are rich with elaborate presentations, focusing on a single style or theme, and offering variations and options to make each creation unique. She covers a range of techniques and mediums, including fiber jewelry, brick stitch, netted beadwork, floral composition, and Zulu weaving.

Outreach through management

Diane's business skills have helped her manage, organize, and promote her beading business. Though several of her books are no longer in print, she sells PDF and CD versions on her Web site, dianefitzgerald.com. Not only does Diane combine passion, design, and technical skill in her beadwork, but she's also mastered electronic information management.

The scope of Diane's organization is amazing. She owns Beautiful Beads, a small shop not far from her home in Minneapolis, Minn., in the U.S. Diane explains that the shop was originally intended for small Saturday morning classes. Beautiful Beads is now open by

chance and by appointment.

The beads in Diane's shop are organized in sectioned bins with reference cards, so customers can absorb all the potential choices at a glance. Diane favors Miyuki and Toho cylinder beads (she has been to the Miyuki factory in Japan to see the beads produced). She also cherishes vintage glass beads and contemporary art glass.

Interdisciplinary influences

Diane believes that everyone can benefit from the experiences of other cultures as she explores her own style. Diane has traveled to the Czech Republic, Germany, England, Morocco, South Africa, Italy — over three dozen countries in all — to learn about the bead industry, the history of beads, and the people who work with beads.

When working through a design, Diane also draws upon words of wisdom from other fields. She is encouraged by critical thinker Edward de Bono, who advises one to always look for a second “right answer.” Likewise, she embraces the advice of textile designer Jack Lenor Larsen, who urges artists to do something, then do something to that, and then do something to that.

Finally, Diane clings to traditions of beauty. She is drawn to traditional woven patterns as well as classic designs from nature, such as the elegance of the ginkgo leaf. In addition, Diane has a weakness for flowers, intrigue, and adventure.

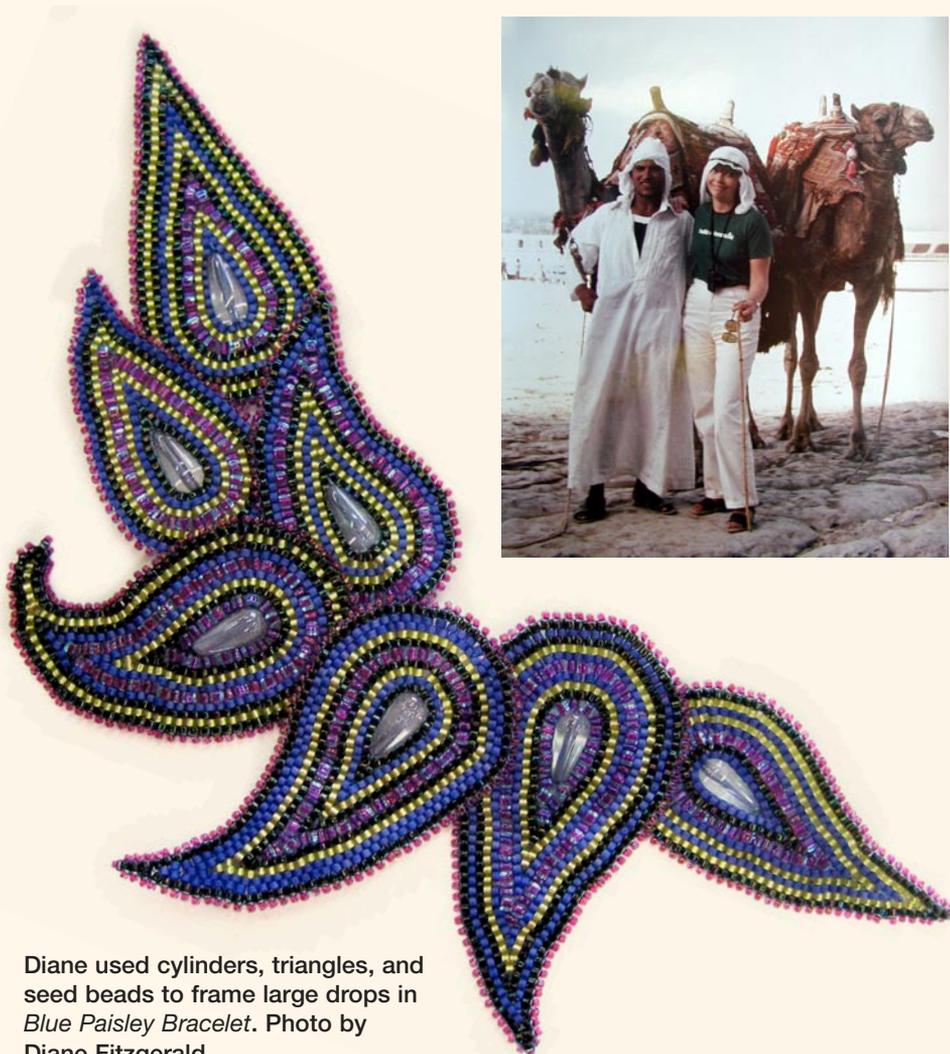
Fortunately for beaders everywhere, Diane's work reflects the colors, patterns, and shapes of all she has experienced. Not everyone can dedicate a career to beads, or wander the world in

pursuit of them. But through her classes, her books, and her astonishing beadwork, Diane gives others a glimpse into the life of a master. ●

Barbara A. McGuire is a nationally recognized painter, jewelry designer, and polymer clay artist. She has



written 10 books on design and instruction and has developed stamps, templates, and molds for artists working with polymer and metal clay. To learn more about her work, visit barbaramcguire.com.



Diane used cylinders, triangles, and seed beads to frame large drops in *Blue Paisley Bracelet*. Photo by Diane Fitzgerald.



Left: Always an obliging guest in a foreign culture, Diane allows camels to carry her beads in Cairo, Egypt. Photo by Susan Moore.

Below: Inspired by Ferrero Rocher chocolates and a picture in a 1950s Betty Crocker cookbook, Diane stitched Swarovski bicone crystals and Delica beads into 64 bite-sized *Crystal Bonbons*. Photo by Diane Fitzgerald.

