

Hetal Vakil

From A Designing Bloodline

She was one of five designers chosen to contribute to the World Gold Council's first jewellery trend book for India in 1995-96. "I was only 19 then and I had the opportunity to work with Italian designer Biatriz Biagi, who was appointed coordinator for the book. It was a great learning experience for me. I was sent to tour several southern cities

to conduct seminars to train jewellers on how to use the trend book."

Creativity and designing jewellery runs in Hetal Vakil's bloodline. Her mother, Harshada, is a jewellery designer, and her sister Lakshmi teaches diamond grading and gemmology. "Since my childhood I have seen my mother designing beautiful pieces, and





the art caught my fancy.” No sooner had she completed her schooling at age 14, she joined a six-month course at the Gemmological Institute of India, Mumbai, and topped her class. She also enrolled for a course from the Fellowship of the Gemmological Association of Great Britain and completed the two-year course in just one year. At the age of 15 and a half, she began teaching at the GII, and identifying and grading stones at the lab. That’s when she discovered the joys of teaching.

She would happily have carried on with her teaching, but at the insistence of her parents, she completed her graduation in commerce. But even then, she squeezed in time to pursue her calling in life, and during a vacation break, headed to the Gemological Institute of America in Santa Monica, to do a three-month course in designing.

Thereafter she worked with several jewellers abroad, even submitting over 100 designs for a Saudi Arabia-based firm. Meanwhile in India, she began

to work with manufacturers based in SEEPZ. Recognition came early to her, and two of her designs were selected for the final round of the DeCTA Designer Awards (which were initiated at the insistence of Solitaire, and have now evolved into the Solitaire Design Awards, having morphed in between to the De Beers Design Awards) for two consecutive years.

After her experience with the WGC trend book, Vakil realised that teaching jewellery designing was something she enjoyed, and so for a couple of years, she taught at the Jewellery Product Development Centre, Mumbai. She also held special seminars at the National Institute of Design and the National Institute of Fashion Technology, and conducted in-house training for private jewellery companies.

In between her teaching assignments she also designed jewellery for different companies and varied individual customers. “Designing as a concept was in its infancy in India then.



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And it was a completely new field for all of us," recalls Vakil. "My learning curve was steep in those days." She, however, credits her jewellery craftsmen for teaching her the intricacies of jewellery fabrication.

Riding high on the twin passions of teaching and designing, she ultimately set up the Vakil's Academy of Jewellery Design. The institute offers a six-month comprehensive course on jewellery designing and a three-month course on diamond grading and valuation. The institute also trains students for the entrance exams for the SNTD jewellery designing and manufacturing diploma course, and coaches those who are enrolled in the GIA distance education programme.

Today, it has been 18 years, since she has been teaching and designing, and enthusiasm has not dimmed.

Nature, geometric- and abstract forms are her favourite themes, which she interprets through jewellery. She speaks fervently about her latest themes in trendy *jadau* pendants strung on a flat Italian choker; chandeliers with uncut gemstones; the use of rose-cut and shaded diamonds; the extensive use of *meenakari*; jewellery made of yellow gold with different textures; black plated gold; pearl jewellery; and much more. "Chunky rings and chandelier earrings still retain their hold, but the focus is now shifting to bangles, cuffs, bracelets and neckwear," Vakil notes. She also works with large semi-precious stones with unusual cuts, around which jewellery is designed. She specializes in detachable or changeable jewellery for her customers to mix practicality and aesthetics.

— Shanoo Bijlani