



PHOTOS BY CHRISTIAN PARLEY/THE BEE

Kay Gaston of Visalia enjoys making dichroic glass jewelry. Her jewelry line, which she named Plain and Fancy, includes earrings, bolo ties, pendants and tie clips. She says dichroic glass was originally developed by the aerospace industry.

Jewelry with glass

Kay Gaston of Visalia finds joy in creating her colorful works of art.

By Mary Lou Aguirre
The Bee

VISALIA — Kay Gaston's home is filled with evidence of her creativity. A former spare bedroom holds fabric for making whimsical cloth dolls. Hanging quilts have a place on the walls.

And now, after discovering the joy of jewelry made of dichroic glass, a three-panel display shows off her latest handiwork.

It was almost a year ago that the Visalia resident took a jewelry-making class in Oakhurst. Initially, Gaston was lukewarm about the class, but went to keep a friend company.

Gaston loved it.

"My friend didn't get into it," she says.

Today, Gaston has her own line of earrings, bolo ties, pendants and tie clips made using dichroic glass. Gaston says the glass was developed by the aerospace industry for use in satellite mirrors.

The glass, consisting of thin layers, is placed in a vacuum chamber and bombarded by an intense electron beam, according to the Web site www.jillsjewelry.net. The result is an iridescent sparkle.

Gaston, 59, a retired physical therapist, likes the glittery effects she can create. The jewel-tone colors cover the spectrum. But to create more dichroic glass jewelry at home, she needed one key piece of equipment.

"I thought, 'I have to have a kiln,'" she says.

She brought a starter "beehive" kiln and is able to fit eight pieces of glass inside.

The heat fuses the layers that Gaston places together. Edges of glass that went in straight come out rounded after firing. The shapes are not uniform, which is part



Kay Gaston, 59, of Visalia says she likes the glittery effects she can create with jewelry made with dichroic glass.

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Jewelry: Gaston is a stickler for quality

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of the appeal of creating a one-of-kind look.

"It's thrilling to open up the kiln and see how everything turned out," she says. "The color and the sparkle appeal to me."

Cheryl Rupp of Visalia likes the look of Gaston's jewelry. She owns four necklaces and three sets of earrings.

"I had purchased dichroic jewelry in Morro Bay and Cambria," Rupp says. "I couldn't believe someone locally was doing such beautiful work. I get a lot of compliments and have started to give out Kay's business cards. Her jewelry is very unique and striking."

Gaston says it only takes two hours to fire enough glass to create several items of jewelry. There's much more instant gratification in this hobby than in making quilts, which can take months to complete.

Still, Gaston is a stickler for quality. She named her line of jewelry Plain and Fancy, and won't sell anything that she wouldn't wear.

She's a walking display for her earrings and pendants. Her husband, Pierre, wears the

bolo ties and has even sold them off his neck. The couple keep a small collection of items in the car in case they run into interested customers.

Her jewelry is sold at the Tulare County Museum gift shop and the Fresno Art Museum. She recently sold her items at a crafts fair in Springville, and is considering other venues.

Gaston has been accepted into the annual Top of the Line show that will be held in Visalia in November. All crafters must submit slides of their work and prove they make their items.

She admits she's new to the craft-show circuit.

"Even if people come to my booth and don't buy, they still admire the jewelry," she says. "That's good for the ego."

She enjoys experimenting with the glass and keeps a log of which color of glass worked well and which didn't.

"I don't know where this jewelry-making will take me. I love exploring this new avenue," Gaston says. "Busy hands are happy hands."

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