



PHOTOS BY WENDI FITZGERALD / POST-DISPATCH

Lisa Kay makes one-of-a-kind necklaces in her home in Alton. This piece, called "Woven Paths," includes glass beads, amber and stones that are individually knotted on antique fishing fly-line and then interwoven. The centerpiece is carved jade.



Lisa Kay designs contemporary prayer-bead neckwear. After creating pieces, she takes them to various areas of her home, where she sits with them and "gets a feel" for them. Draped in one necklace with another across her lap, Kay spends a moment peeking at one of her two dogs on an outside balcony.

## Jewelry that resonates with the rhythm of the soul

By LISA JONES TOWNSL  
Post-Dispatch Fashion Editor

**B**Y DAY, art therapist Lisa Kay uses the crafts of mask-making, painting and sculpture to encourage young students to confront anger and conflict. By night, she retreats to the lower level of her home in Alton and finds catharsis in art of

a different kind.

Taking random chunks of stone, chips of beads, bits of wire and lots of imaginative energy, Kay creates "neck pieces" that celebrate life, its challenges and its triumphs.

"I just like the energy. It's a treasure hunt, and it's really fun rummaging



For her mother's 80th birthday, Kay strung hand-painted beads, rare stones and fun little trinkets together to form a priceless gem of the heart. "I enjoy playing with color and texture in my work by mixing the precious with the mundane," she says.

through things," says Kay. "That's the fun part, taking something and changing it."

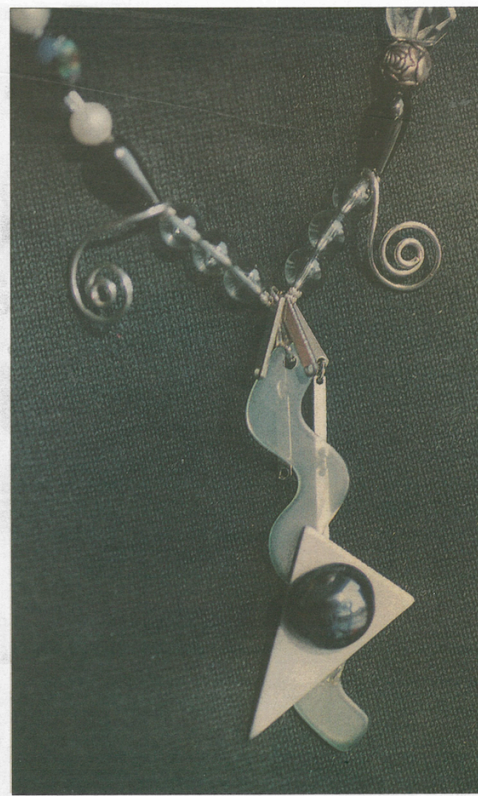
Kay, a 47-year-old certified art therapist and licensed clinical counselor, works in an area that smells of spice and is bedecked by bowls of beads, strings of hanging spare parts and an old library windowpane. She started toying with the idea of necklace-making after she attended a contemporary prayer-bead workshop in Chicago in July 1999.

She went hoping to learn ways to enrich the therapy experience for her students at the Catholic Children's Home, where she is the art-therapy director. But before the end of the workshop, Kay personally fell for the idea of integrating life experiences with artistic creativity.

"It wasn't planned. It just happened," she says of her newfound passion. "I like to put things together in an eclectic way."

Spirituality is at the base of the art form, Kay says, but she doesn't always need (or use) such symbolism to get her creative juices flowing. Anything can inspire her creations, which are clever dichotomies of rough and smooth textures and classic and edgy designs.

Most of her work begins with a pendant that started off life as a



In "Picasso's Dream," Kay recycles an old earring (the centerpiece) with other unlikely finds.

road find, a family heirloom or even a garage-sale treasure. Friends often give her old necklaces that they no longer wear, and relatives donate interesting beads from their travels.

Kay doesn't rush the process. She may work on six, seven, even eight pieces at once — leaving each at a different stage. Some she hangs around her beading studio for warmth and inspiration. Others

find temporary homes in her living room, bedroom, even the bathroom.

"I like to sit with them. I might want to change them. It's like a waiting place," she says.

Kay offers ethereal names, such as "Life's Natural Order," "Woven Paths" and "The Serpent's Feathers," for her work and provides short story cards that outline the mood and materials used for each.

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Dragon," are inspired by stories, events and ancient lore. Other pieces have more personal connections, such as the ornate work she made in honor of her mother's 80th birthday.

But in the case of "Picasso's Dream," Kay says she had no idea what she intended to make until she started stringing hematite, moonstone chips, Austrian crystals and a friend's old earring piece together. The result was a resplendent work of neck art.

She is most proud of her first piece, the one she made during that Chicago workshop. It was there that Kay, who is Jewish, crafted a piece that resembled a tallit, or prayer shawl. Made of art-deco buttons, amethyst chunks, uncut turquoise, pipestone, copper and acrylic, the open-ended necklace lies across the neck like a shawl. This wasn't just a personal achievement for Kay. Galleries near and far scooped up the piece for exhibits as well.

Right now, Kay sells her work to friends and through galleries that offer to put pieces on display. But she soon hopes to expand her business to area stores and to the Web. (She already has a company name and Web site.

From April 16 through May 9, about 20 of Kay's neck pieces will be on display and for sale at the art gallery of the Jewish Community Center, 2 Millstone Campus Drive in Creve Coeur. Prices range from \$75 for smaller pieces to \$500 for larger ones. The average price is about \$125.

"It resonates with the rhythm of my soul," Kay says of her passion, her creative energy and, mostly, her jewelry. "It's a dance. It's a flow."

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