



VIVA LAZONDI!



Clockwise from top: Pendant design with loved one's ashes (illustration Beth Norling); pendant designed by Kazia Hegel and made by Sondi Stankov; ring design with concealed diamond (Beth Norling) —'this ring looks like a simple exterior, but it holds my complex secret'; ring, mokume gane of Sterling silver, shakudo, 24 ct. gold (*Four Elements*, Blaxland Gallery, 1995); music medals c1908-18 —'I feel honoured to be able to wear my mother's music medals'; Indian Chief gear shift knob with American Indian head nickel; interchangeable hands for brass cue, used as pointer; pearl clasp, 18ct yellow gold, 24 ct gold and diamond; ear piercing, fine gold wire with diamonds, 1995, Ceremony at Holdsworth Galleries; centre: pendant design with 5 baby teeth —'Sondi was so enthusiastic when I approached her with this idea. If she wasn't so accessible, the teeth would still be in the drawer!' Photo of Sondi by David Wallace. Opposite page: Sondi's production line earrings and brooch

From the wide, curtainless window of jeweller **Sondi Stankov's** studio in Wentworth Falls in the Blue Mountains, one looks down over a steep green valley towards the east where the towers of metropolitan Sydney are scattered along the horizon. At a certain time at the end of the day, the dying sun's rays are reflected from these glass towers as shooting flames. Sydney on fire! As the sky slowly darkens, and its pinks and blues turn to golds and greys and then to black, the glittering lights sparkle and pulsate.

If one were to venture into the rugged wilderness of the steep valley which she overlooks and which falls sharply into a rocky crevasse, one would look down into this void to see far below just the canopy of tall gumtrees. A secret place where one might disappear without trace.

Sondi's workbench is a rich dark red gum—handcrafted for her by Steven Johnstone. It is the heart of her workplace and on it her jeweller's tools of trade are laid side-by-side in orderly lines. A potted cyclamen adds a bright splash of lipstick pink. Sondi's postcard collection causes visitors to stop in mid-sentence as their eyes inadvertently settle on the unexpected erotic image.

Sondi's American accent clarifies as much as it conceals: the child of a large ethnic conglomerate ('Russian, Jewish, German, Norwegian Protestant, Polish'), brought up in Denver, Colorado, Sondi met Lazar Stankov, a Yugoslav academic, when he was studying for his PhD at the University of Denver. (Lazar + Sondi = Lazondi, Sondi's business name.) When Lazar was obliged to return to Belgrade for two years to repay his country's generosity in sending him to America, Sondi went too and one of their two children was born there. The family migrated to Australia in 1973. Sondi's background and her present lifestyle have been natural, if subtle, influences on her jewellery. Robin Moorhouse describes some of Sondi's commissions, collaborations, production jewellery and exhibition pieces:

Secretive, ritualistic, emotional. These are unusual words to describe contemporary jewellery and yet the custom-designed work of Sondi Stankov is exactly that.

The challenge of how to use five baby teeth from a client's five children, or set an inherited diamond 'rock' of 5.35 carats without flaunting it, or use a loved one's ashes, all have been met by Sondi Stankov.

Few jewellers are open to the challenge of interpreting a client's needs and working within these limitations. This is Sondi's forté: an interest in making the unusual and spending time with clients, drawing forth their ideas and feelings. This is what makes the pieces so personal for the owner and so satisfying for the maker.

Sondi believes that her compatibility with clients results from her training with Wal van Heeckeren who taught her 'to be real with myself and have an attitude of generosity in sharing and giving information'. At the same time she discovered an affinity with metal and learned how to 'listen to the materials'.

An early decorative style and subtle eroticism led the way to humour and memorabilia. To incorporate memorabilia into personal jewellery

is a frequent request. To use such objects in an interesting, cohesive design that is more than an eclectic collage is difficult. Her more unusual commissions have been for a diamond-studded gold identification band for a budgerigar and a gear shaft knob with an inlaid coin for an Indian Chief bike enthusiast. Potter Peter Rushforth asked Sondi to incorporate two beautiful drops of glaze from his kiln into earrings for his wife Bobby. And there is humour in the interchangeable gesticulating hands for the end of an unusual brass cue used as a pointer in slide presentations by a university lecturer.

Another influence on Sondi's work resulted from her collaboration with architect and artist Kazia Hegel whose designs for jewellery were clear and architecturally precise. The difficulty lies in translating two-dimensional into three-dimensional. For the designer to realise her vision and the maker to achieve a wearable piece required careful negotiating skills. For the jeweller it necessitated the relinquishing of ego, for the architect it required a loosening process.

While commissions are an important and enjoyable niche market for Sondi, her main work is designed for production. These are handmade, limited edition pieces in a continuing series. There is a continuity of design, materials and value planned in such a way as to create a recognizable style. The style is simple, sophisticated and eminently wearable. There is little decoration, the appeal lying in the coloured metals and softened geometric shapes. Sondi uses 24 ct. gold and sterling silver which is chemically coloured to give black and gold or white and gold. It is this restraint which gives the jewellery its distinctive character.

The challenge with production pieces lies in deciding what will sell and combining this with artistic merit. The maker must be disciplined, not self-indulgent, and be able to anticipate the market. When introducing a new series, she will 'stretch' her buyers and take them a little further towards the unusual. In this way a two-piece design may become three pieces or another single element may be included.

The patterns created by the warm colours and exposed layers of metals of mokume gane (wood-grain metal) add another dimension, while still fitting Sondi's style criteria.

In designing and making pieces for exhibition, there is the opportunity to create from the intuitive side. Although exhibition work means time taken from earning income, it provides a creative impetus, the recognition of peers and the opportunity to challenge the accepted. There is also the discipline of working to criteria set down for a prestigious exhibition.

Sondi's most recent exhibition piece was for the 1995 NSW Jewellers and Metalsmith Group exhibition Ceremony. The exhibit was a ritual piece of ear piercing, where a fine gold wire with diamonds was threaded along the ear. It had a seductive cruelty but also Sondi's recognizable style of few elements with the threaded metal the main focus.

Commission, production and exhibition... a successful, disciplined continuity that still allows for fun, distraction and discretion.

Robin Moorhouse (formerly Stubbs) is a jeweller and writer who is now studying sculpture.

