

Bryan Brown has opened a new studio in Sisters

By Jodi Schneider
Correspondent

In his small upstairs “Metals” Jewelry Studio in Sisters, precious-metal artist and gemologist Bryan Lee Brown spends time skillfully crafting jewelry and other exquisite pieces using a 400-year-old Japanese metal art technique.

Mokume-gane, or “wood-grain metal,” is the intricate process Brown practices. The metal forging technique was developed by master metalworker Dembei Shoame in the 17th century to decorate swords of samurai warriors. The mokume-gane-embellished swords the samurai wore were essentially large pieces of jewelry; fashion elements intended to convey their position and status to the world.

Brown’s calling in jewelry-making commenced at an early age.

“I was 15 in high school, living in Detroit, and my dad arranged a job for me to get me off the streets,” Brown told *The Nugget*. “I started working for a biker that had a small store just outside of Detroit. He showed me the basics of soldering and jewelry repair work.”

Brown left for Los Angeles after returning home from serving in the U.S. Marines to become a student at the Gemological Institute of America and graduated as a gemologist.

For over 40 years Brown has been an artist in a business that is diversified enough to keep him very busy.

After working with jewelry for a little more than 20 years, Brown came across something unique that really piqued his curiosity.

Brown said “I had been doing jewelry for a long time and I decided to read through *Jewelry Concepts and Technology*, a huge reference book. I got as far as the Japanese process that talked about mokume-gane and decided to try it — and have been hooked ever since. The technique has the tendency to want to do what it wants to do, and sometimes it’s a surprise to me. I just keep working with it to see what’s going to happen next.”

The traditional components of mokume-gane are relatively soft metallic elements and alloys — gold, platinum, copper, silver, shakudo, (copper with fine gold added) and shibuichi (copper with fine silver added).

“There’s always something new to learn, there’s always a surprise during the process. It’s the collaboration

of the artist and the metals,” said Brown. “There are different ways to achieve more unique effects by twisting or denting the flattened piece for example. And the final design is realized when the piece is complete, it’s always changing, and that’s why I keep creating using this technique; it keeps me entertained.”

Brown starts the process by stacking different colored metals until he reaches many layers of alternating metals.

Brown noted, “I start with a stack of metal like shibuichi, that goes in between two steel plates. Then those are clamped together under pressure and put in an electric kiln. And as the temperature increases the metals are brought up to their eutectic point. As they reach this point the metals begin to mingle together at an atomic level, forming a new metal between the original layers and binding them together as one.”

From Christmas ornaments to delicate bowls and intricate rings to unique pendants, every piece of mokume-gane Brown designs carries a bit of Japanese history.

Brown said, “The one thing I enjoy about the Japanese arts is that it all looks so simple to the eye

because of the clean lines, graceful style and its simplicity. But I found that with what looks the simplest, is generally the hardest thing to accomplish.”

Brown does trade work for other stores, and since he relocated to Sisters three years ago with his son, Liam, he’s been a wholesaler for boutiques around Central Oregon, including Sisters.

He added, “Although I’m in the wholesale business, I’ve got a lot of inventory and would like people to come on up to my working shop and see what I have, and I’d be happy to explain the process that I use.”

Brown’s studio is located at 220 S. Ash St., Suite B, upstairs in the Three Creeks building. Visitors are welcome during business hours.

Brown also does a huge amount of repair work and uses a special process to repair pottery called kintsugi.

Kintsugi is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery using adhesive and 24-carat gold.

“The pottery usually has some sort of sentimental value to the person, and they want to emphasize the breakage or the history of the piece,” said Brown.

One of the first things you



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER

Sisters artist Bryan Brown designs jewelry using ancient process.

notice when you meet this friendly precious-metal artist is his unique glasses that he made himself out of gold.

“I was going for John Lennon’s glasses but it’s more of a 1900s type of look. I did all the hinges and all the screws, made everything. It

began as rough gold, I molded it, poured the ingot, poured the wire and drew the wire.”

Brown does any type of custom jewelry work, including traditional gold, platinum and silver. He also does lapidary work and will work with any type of stone he can inlay.

Celebrating 4th Friday Artwalk
Supporting the Arts in Sisters for three generations. Visit Sisters Saloon & Ranch Grill after the Artwalk for dinner and drinks in one of Sisters’ most historic buildings. Dine in or take out. Open til midnight.

190 E. Cascade Ave. • 541-549-RIBS

Sarah Hansen & Kelley Salber
Featured Artists
May 24 • 4 to 7 p.m.
FOURTH FRIDAY ART STROLL

541-749-1800 • 357 W. HOOD AVE., SISTERS • HOODAVENUEART.COM

METALS
By Artist Bryan Lee Brown

Jewelry • Repair • Custom Work
Specializing in mokume-gane or wood-grained metal and kintsugi, a unique way of repairing pottery with gold.
Over 40 years of experience

Come on up! Tuesday-Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Upstairs in the Three Creek Building, 220 S. Ash St., Ste. 8
541-904-0410 • metals.bb@gmail.com

Sisters Kiwanis
ANTIQUES, JEWELRY & COLLECTIBLES SALE!

Proceeds from this sale go to support local youth organizations, scholarships for students, awards to career-changing adults and much more!

Saturday, May 25
7 a.m. to 2 p.m.
301 S. Elm St.