

# When all the pieces come together

Kai Raden, mosaic artist and teacher, opens Creations Studio and Gallery in Astoria

By HEATHER DOUGLAS  
FOR COAST WEEKEND

**F**our years ago, mosaic artist Kai Raden suffered a panic attack while contemplating her decision to move across the country from Arkansas to Astoria. Her best friend suggested she write down the answer to a simple question on a piece of paper: Where do you see yourself in a year?

She wrote down her goal — and then promptly forgot about it.

Last month, Raden, who also teaches the art of mosaic, held the grand opening of her new Astoria studio, Creations Studio and Gallery (1390 Duane St.), where people can show up and learn to make mosaics themselves.

After the opening, Raden unexpectedly found that piece of paper with the goal written on it: to live and work in Astoria as a full-time artist, and to open her own studio.

Raden's first stop in the Pacific Northwest, however, was Portland, where she met her fiancée, Eric Coburn. But when the big city became too expensive, the couple moved to Astoria.

The decision seemed like a natural one. Raden had explored Astoria while visiting a friend who lived on the Long Beach Peninsula.

"She took me to all the galleries in Cannon Beach and Seaside. On the way back, we drove through Astoria," Raden said. "I thought, 'This is the most amazing, cute, cool, quaint, funky little town.' I love Astoria. I've always wanted to be in a small community where everybody waves to each other in the morning."

## Permission to break things

Once in Astoria, Raden began her quest to find a studio and an opportunity to share her love of mosaic art.

The Art Loft, co-owned by Jeannette Davis and Jo Pomeroy-Crockett, helped Raden get her start as a local art teacher.

"I kind of feel like they nurtured me along," Raden said. "I was a baby bird in the nest when I first started — and now I've launched."

Debbie Horvath, one of Raden's first students, found her classes on Facebook.

"I did it for mental therapy," Horvath said. "I



ABOVE: Kai Raden, a mosaic artist, shows off one of her pieces in her new Astoria studio, Creations Studio & Gallery

HEATHER DOUGLAS PHOTO

TOP: One of Kai Raden's mosaic pieces hangs in the window of Creations Studio and Gallery in downtown Astoria.

COLIN MURPHEY PHOTO

needed to get out of the house and live again."

A recent widow, Horvath showed up at her doorstep at the Art Loft for her first class and fell in love with it. "I went to a second and then third class, and then just started hanging out," she said.

Raden herself first discovered mosaic art for similar reasons back in Arkansas. During a difficult time, a friend she was commiserating with told Raden about a "new studio in town that lets you break things."

"I thought, 'I need that!'" Raden remembered. She took to the art form immediately and became fast friends with the owner.

"When I was having a bad day, she would just stack up a bunch of tiles for me, give me a hammer and let me go. I'd just sit over in the corner and bash tile," Raden said with a laugh.

Pomeroy-Crockett said Raden is a "very helpful, patient, encouraging and supportive teacher," and when she worked with students at Knappa High School, "the results were spectacular."

## A forgiving art form

After outgrowing her space at The Art Loft, Raden wanted to create something different than what she had been doing before.

At Creations Studio and Gallery, she has created a workshop environment instead of scheduled classes — anytime she's there and the doors are open, it's class time.

So, for people who have perhaps an hour one day, then five another day, they can work it into their schedule.

In addition, Raden has the tools — glass, buttons, shells, beads — and instructions, and she works with patrons one-on-one. "It's very casual and laid back," she said.

Raden does have a few rules: No politics or negativity walks through the door; only positive energy is allowed.

She extends this mindset to everyday aspects of running a new business, down to her walk to work every morning.

"I wave to other shop owners on my route every morning," she said. "It's a dream come true."

Raden has words for people who claim they don't have an artistic side.

"That whole 'I'm not artistic' thing doesn't really apply. Mosaic is a very forgiving art form," she said. "Bring your imagination and your creativity. I'll teach you how to do the rest." 