

WORKING @ HOME

A real gem of a home

Jewellery designer creates sparkle from her basement



photos: jordanprussky.com

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Special to Sun Media

Terri Michael's voice will be familiar to you from her years as a Toronto radio personality, and currently you can watch her host *Famous Faces* on the Biography Channel. Both of these mediums require agile communication skills and a zest for performance. Her creative careers took a twist when she put her full attention and genuine excitement into the world of jewellery design and production. This allowed Michael to move from a full-time life in sound booths and studios to the comfort and stability of her home in Toronto's Leaside neighborhood.

Stoned Originals (www.StonedOriginals.com) is Michael's line of jewellery that she first conceived decades ago. The line, which she interprets as funky yet elegant, began out of necessity.

"I couldn't find anything to fit for a very small wrist and a very small neck," explains Michael from her dining room that looks out onto the pool in the backyard. "I had made jewellery for myself and for my friends. It was a good hobby. People would come to me – they would hear that I make custom pieces for friends. I did recognize pretty quickly that we are all built very differently and that custom sizing is something that you can't get when you shop retail."

The specific needs of a growing clientele was what led to Michael's

hobby becoming a multi-staffed online business. With 300 pieces currently in the line, the necklaces, earrings and bracelets that Michael designs are created in her downstairs workshop and then constructed by her cottage-industry staff, who also work from home. When it came to deciding whether to open a retail store or stick to an online service, it was a no-brainer.

"It's that feeling of being able to work on your own schedule that's very appealing," she says. "If I had a store, I would have to show up there every day for 9:30 a.m. and not leave until 6 p.m. This way, I can design on my own time, I can do other things. My customers come to me via the Internet, so when I get an order, I can address it at any moment during the day. I don't have to be trapped in a store to take an order in."

Down in the basement, Michael points out the features of her workroom with delight. "These cabinets here are actually the old kitchen that was originally in the house and they have come in really handy. All my elements - my beads, my pearls - it's all organized perfectly." It is just then that the furnace starts up, right there in her workroom. "Women get cold, so the furnace in here is wonderful!" she says. "I have my little TV and my classical music on the radio and it's all I need. It's perfectly secluded, and I do prefer a little quiet, but I am still in the house if anybody needs me."

A work table covered in beads,

several pairs of tiny pliers and a spotlight suggest Michael has been designing recently. Up against the walls are dozens of bins that hold hundreds of colour-coded stones, beads and metals. "When I am in the right headspace, it's difficult for me to stop," she says. "So I will go down there and I'll work through the afternoon and into the evening...and the next thing I know it's two in the morning. I can sit there and just keep going. I wish the designing part was all I had to do, because I really love it."



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Jewellery designer Terri Michael

From inventory and shipping to website maintenance and promotion, there is no shortage of Stoned Originals duties for Michael to look after. With the kitchen and living room on the main floor and a sunken large dining area, Michael's home is wonderful for entertaining, so for some clients it is a meeting spot. "Occasionally, for regular customers, they will come here and they can try things on. Publicists and agency people will often meet here around this table."



Michael constantly adds new pieces to her line. While catering to women, her website includes a "Help for Guys" section for clueless other halves who are desperate for ideas. Her business practice includes a philanthropic element, as she contributes her profits to eight women's shelters across North America, including Toronto's Redwood Shelter. Michael knows the business will grow and will be a candidate for a larger operation, but she understands the value of working from home.

"Having your home be your working environment is tremendous," she says. "I spent 30 years going somewhere every day to work somewhere else. To be able to work full-time from here means that my work and my private life can spill over in a very comfortable way. It gives you that freedom to run your kid to the doctor's office if you need to or let the dog out and then get back to what you are doing. It's that perfect marriage of private and business. I am truly working on my own time."