



Off the beaded path

Beader Venice makes Venetian glass jewelry with a local twist

BY CATHERINE SHU
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Top: Venetian glass bottles with a ceramic core can hold a few drops of essential oil for day-long aroma therapy.
Right: Beader Venice staff spent 10 months observing leopards at the zoo before creating leopard-spot beads.
Below: Lariat necklaces by Beader Venice.
Bottom: The interior of Beader Venice's store on Longquan Street, near Shida night market.



The inside of Beader Venice (彼得威尼斯) near the Shida night market looks like a candy shop filled with sweets in different flavors and colors. But the wares within are all Venetian glass jewelry, handmade in Taipei out of raw materials imported from Italy.

Crystal-clear pendants shaped like *spirulina* pasta and accented with ocean blue or deep plum swirls hang from silver chains, while longer necklaces are made of strands of beads that shine with gold foil. Rings sparkle like disco balls with a dusting of silver glitter trapped in the glass. More whimsical selections include tiny glass pandas, fish and daisies.

Designer Louis Chiang (江奕辰) opened the store last summer after 12 years as a glassmaker creating jewelry and collectibles for clients including Sogo, Eslite and the National Palace Museum. The technique Chiang uses to make his Venetian glass beads, pendants and charms is called lampworking and has a history that stretches back more than seven centuries. Most of the store's glass jewelry is made in Beader Venice's workshop in Zhonghe by Chiang and his team of eight glassmakers, but customers can catch a glimpse of the process at a workbench in the store where staff create jewelry prototypes in between serving patrons.

Venetian glass (also known as Murano glass) is characterized by bright, clear colors, fluid shapes, raised motifs and patterns on the surface of the glass, and layered effects such as metallic foil trapped in the center of each bead. First, the glassmaker selects a glass cane from a rainbow-colored assortment imported from Italy. A blowtorch clamped to the side of the table shoots out a steady flame, into which one end of the cane is exposed. The molten glass is spun around the end of a metal rod and held near the flame to keep it supple as it is sculpted or twisted into different shapes; colors are added by carefully touching the ends of other glass canes to the bead's surface.

Chiang founded his company in 2001 as Jader Art (彼得藝術中心). In 2005, he first traveled to Murano, an island near Venice that is considered the center of Italy's glass trade. Chiang had studied glassmaking at Liuli Gongfang, a Taiwanese company that specializes in traditional Chinese glassware, and joined the International Guild of Glass Artists, but he says his trip to Murano and Venice first opened his eyes to the possibilities of art glass.

"I already had a strong interest in glassmaking, but I thought of it as a craft. Then I went to Venice. I'd never seen anything as beautiful as the glass there. Before that, I'd never really thought about

how glassmaking was related to fashion and art," says Chiang, who renamed his company Beader Venice last year.

Chiang's design philosophy is influenced by his mother, who was a dressmaker for 40 years, and his master's in business administration from National Chengchi University's Graduate Institute of Technology and Innovation Management (政治大學科技管理研究所).

"Business school was good training. Artists sometimes don't think about marketing and what their niche is, but I know we have to focus on those things to be successful," says Chiang. "And what I learned from my mother is how to communicate with a customer so you can make something that suits their style."

Chiang infuses many of his accessories with local flavor, drawing on motifs from Taiwanese and Chinese culture. The shop's best sellers include cell phone charms in the shape of gold ingots, *zongzi* (粽子, a glutinous rice dumpling wrapped in leaves, which is a traditional good luck symbol for students), carp and Chinese radishes (NT\$220). A new series of jewelry called Beader Garden (彼得花園) will feature beads embellished with lotus and peony blossoms, as well as butterflies and koi.

Other designs put a contemporary spin on a centuries-old art. One recent series picked up on the fad for leopard print. Chiang and his staff studied photos and went to the Taipei Zoo to see the animals in action before spending 10 months perfecting the process of translating the leopard's coat into glass. The results are beads with delicate brown and sienna colored spots on the surface lit up from within with a layer of gold foil.

Other items at Beader Venice include heart-shaped perfume bottle pendants, which have a cork stopper and a ceramic core that soaks up a few drops of essential oil (NT\$1,900) and rings topped with glass daisies or glittery beads (NT\$490 to NT\$880). More elaborate items include a long necklace of beads in different designs and textures linked with a chain (NT\$3,280) and a bracelet of leopard-spotted and rose-colored beads (NT\$1,780).

"I want to make things that don't just catch a customer's fancy now, but that they can wear for years," says Chiang.

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Left: A double-stranded necklace by Beader Venice.
Below: Mobile phone charms are Beader Venice's best sellers and come in an assortment of whimsical shapes and lucky symbols.
Bottom: Beader Venice founder and designer Louis Chiang demonstrates glassmaking at his workbench.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

