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Jacqui
Ridley's

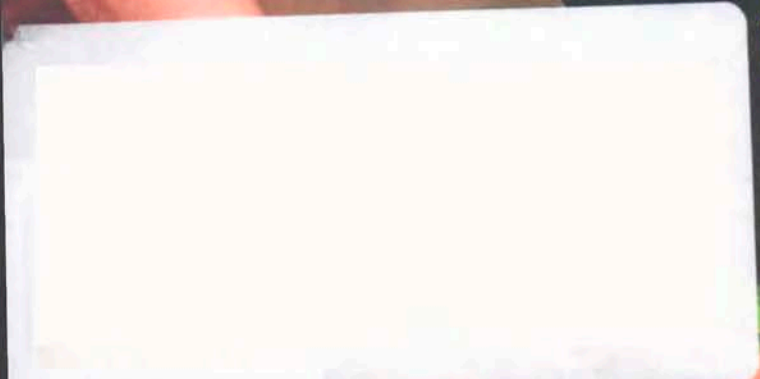
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Mosaic Masterpieces

Mosaic artist Jacqui Ridley credits personal relationships, publicity, and proper pricing for her success.

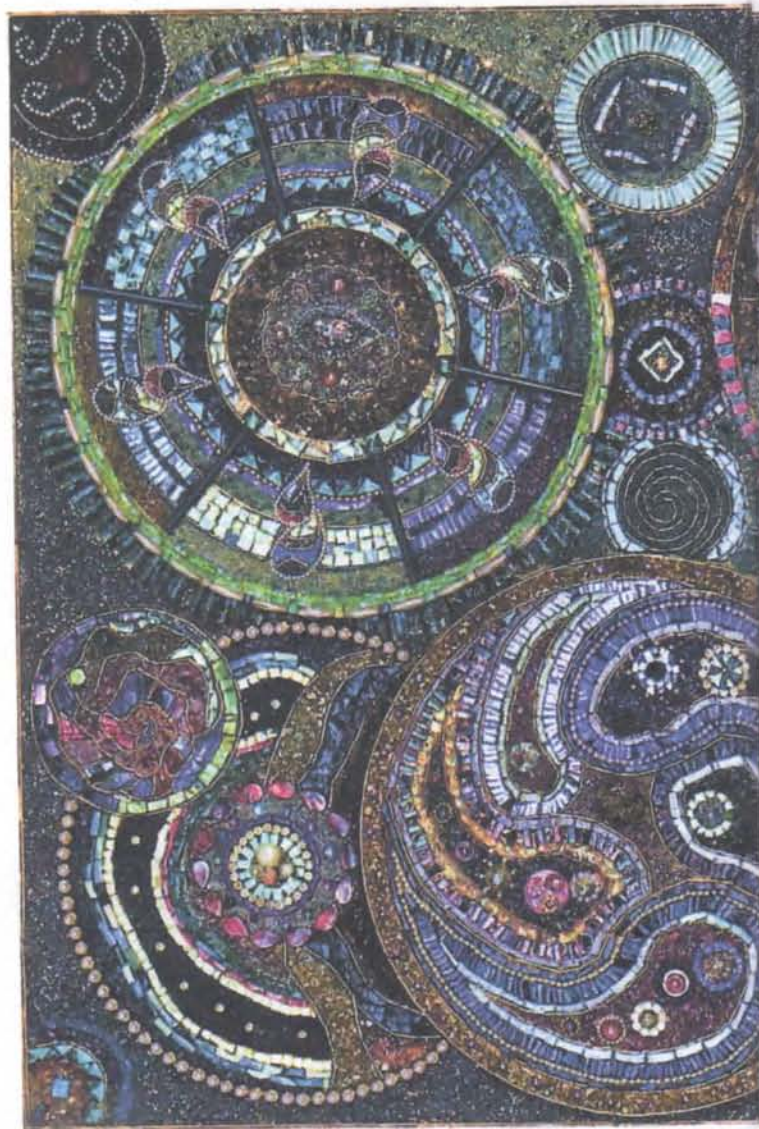
by Linda Harbrecht



Jacqui Ridley always drew, took art classes when she was an undergrad at Wayne State University, ran a successful bakery business, and found ways to nurture her creative spirit. But something shifted within her when she started playing with pieces of leftover floor tile and saw a face emerge.

"I just started breaking it up with a hammer and put the pieces together and created these abstract faces," says the now-well-established Michigan mosaic artist. "I don't know quite how to describe it. Everything just clicked. I loved fitting these pieces together and seeing the process evolve. It's almost something out of my control. It just, I don't know...works."

Much has changed since Ridley first indulged her



artistic fancy in 2004, after 16 years of running a bakery business that fulfilled her need for creative expression while supplying a second income for her family.

Now considered one of the foremost mosaic artists in the country, she operates a thriving business that produces everything from affordable smaller wall pieces to grand-scale public murals. Some custom pieces can command prices in excess of \$10,000.

But her meteoric rise in the field didn't come without guidance, support, and inspiration from others, which she readily acknowledges. Chief among them was Peggy Wolf, owner of the Chicago-based Chiaroscuro gallery that showcased the work of accomplished artisans.

"Soon after I started making these small functional pieces like light switch covers, boxes, and salt and pepper shakers, I would visit my sons in Chicago and would always go to Chiaroscuro, which was filled with one-of-a-kind art from artists all around the country," Ridley says. "When I came home, I decided to call Peggy and

get her feedback on my work, since I really respected her opinion. I sent her some samples, and she called as soon as she received them and placed an order. She said she felt so confident that she could sell them that she sent me a check. Her confidence in me really spurred me on to keep creating and evolving."

Ridley also found support through the Society of Mosaic Artists, which was holding its yearly convention in Miami that year.

"It was a life-changing event for me," Ridley says. "Everyone there was a mosaic artist, from beginners to world-renowned. I went to workshops that featured some of the best artists, went to a juried exhibit of mosaics, and saw a marketplace filled with vendors selling all the materials. It was absolute heaven."

Up to that point, Ridley was primarily self-taught – "I bought every book I could find on mosaics." – and she returned from that experience with renewed enthusiasm for a medium she came to acknowledge as her artistic calling.



INSIGHT | Gained

As someone who was always drawn to the work of modern quilters, such as Paula Nadelstern, Ricky Tims, and Kaffe Fassett, and embroidery artists, such as Young Yang Chung, Ridley began reinterpreting their ability to create with fabric and thread images that employed tiny pieces of glass, tile, and natural materials. One piece that was particularly inspiring to her was a quilt Nadelstern stitched titled "Shards."

"I loved the intricate design and wanted to see if I could capture in glass what she had in fabric," Ridley says. "I decided to contact Paula to ask her permission to recreate it. The moment I saw the quilt in glass, changed everything. The jewel-like design of the quilts that combined the intricate look of embroidery was what I wanted to explore in my mosaics. That's when I knew I'd found my voice."

Her now-distinctive style also contributes to custom collages, which were initially inspired by her desire to create a unique gift for a friend.

"It was a wedding gift, and I wanted to create something the couple would treasure their whole life," she says. "I took pictures of the couple and combined them with mementos and made this mosaic. Now, I'll make any shape and size, and I love working with clients to create a perfect gift. These are pieces that will always be a part of their lives and will honor lasting memories."

Now primarily focusing on two- and three-dimensional large-scale pieces, Ridley says she is fortunate to have a "private gallery" in the form of her husband's new restaurant, the Half Day Café in Rochester Hills, Michigan. "It's given me a wonderful opportunity to showcase my work," she says. "Because of that exposure, I've sold many pieces and gained many commissions."

Additional validation came her way in 2010, when Ridley was one of roughly 1,700 artists accepted for



ArtPrize, a Grand Rapids, Michigan, event and one of the largest art competitions in the world. She joined forces with fellow mosaic artist Joan Schwartz and carpenter Marcus Batchelor to create a 10-

foot by 5-foot cityscape titled "Where We Live."

"Being a part of that creative process and being involved with such a prestigious event was a highlight of my life," says Ridley, who was so inspired by the development that she launched a new business venture to focus on large-scale installations. She joined with Schwartz, Batchelor, and Morrinne Maltzman to found Kaleidoscope Mosaics, which produces commissioned pieces for schools and both private and public spaces.

The collaborations have gone surprisingly well, Ridley says.

"The first time I worked with Joan, we just meshed perfectly," she says. "We have this shared vision and respect for each other's talents, and our work styles just fit together so well."

The partnerships also provide much-needed perspective when a project stalls or inspiration wanes. "It's someone else to bounce ideas off, and a way of looking at a project in a different way," she says. "Our styles and approaches can be very different, but it all works very well. So, in terms of advice for other artists, I would definitely suggest finding kindred spirits."



She also offers the following advice for those who hope to duplicate her success:

- **Don't undervalue your work.** After underpricing earlier pieces, Ridley sought the advice of accomplished businesspeople in the crafts industry. She now closely tracks the time spent meeting with clients, developing concepts, completing the work, and even packaging and shipping. "My work is very, very tedious," she says. "I generally use very small pieces in creating the mosaic, and everything is hand-cut. Then, sometimes, people want different materials, like Italian glass or metals, and it ends up becoming very expensive. So now, the second I finish a piece, I know what the price should be."

- **Don't hesitate to enter competitions or exhibitions.** "For a while, I was concerned that I might not be good enough or far enough along, and I feared rejection," she said. "One day, I decided that I really had nothing to lose and decided to submit my work to a new book titled *Breakout! Your Pathway to Success*. I

knew that thousands of artists were entering and thought I didn't stand a chance. I not

only was accepted, but the author, Brit Hammer-Dijcks, called to tell me that my mosaic would be gracing the cover. That was a great lesson for me: Go after what you want. It also helped me put rejection in perspective. Just go for it, and get out there and let as many people as possible see your work. The more exposure, the better."

- **Find local groups of artisans that share your passion.** Ridley aligned with Mosaic Artists of Michigan (MAM), which she says has provided many opportunities to showcase her work. Even more importantly, she says, is "being part of a group that has such talented and giving artists. Everyone is at different levels, but we all help and support each other by sharing lots of information."

- **Never forget your primary motivation for creating your art.** Acknowledgement and monetary success are certainly desirable, says Ridley, but her most profound reward comes from creating her work and knowing that it is appreciated. "My greatest pleasure is knowing that my mosaics are in someone's home," she says. "That's still the greatest thrill."^{TCR}

For more information, please go to www.jrmosaics.com

