

# a real gem

BY EILEEN JENKINS  
MARKETPLACE STAFF WRITER

Contemplating the clean lines of, say, the classic setting of a Tiffany diamond solitaire ring, one can imagine the jeweler maker working on a pristine workbench in a spick-and-span room painted the same blue as those famous Tiffany boxes.

Contemplating the work of Mystic jeweler Robb Darula, one might imagine — and correctly so — that his studio is filled with incense, batiks, books, music, musical instruments and art. That's because Robb's jewelry is vivid, exotic and colorful. But don't mistake that to mean his pieces are garish.

"I took him a stone I purchased in Brazil," says Shelly Raineau of Mystic, "a 30-carat amethyst. I said, 'I know it's big but I want it in a ring.' The only other stipulation was that it be in yellow gold. What he came back with was majestic. He set the diamonds in such an unusual way, near where your fingers are instead of on

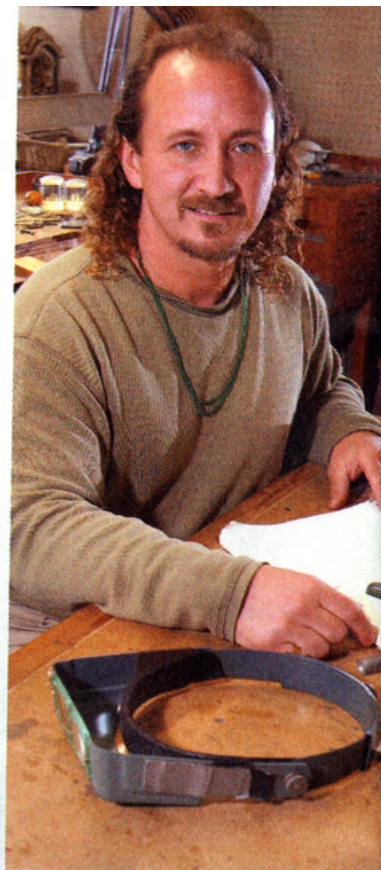
top. Every time I wear it people go 'Wow!' You can't help but notice it, but it's also very simple."

The marriage of grandeur and simplicity isn't easy to pull off, but Robb does. Perhaps due to a kind of clarity achieved through his daily routine of meditation, yoga and kung fu — often done on the banks of the cove outside his home studio. Or it may just be the uncomplicated purpose he assigns his craft.

"When people ask what I do," Robb says, "I tell them that I'm searching for the perfect line."

He's been searching for 20 years ... even longer if you count his childhood interest in the art of jewelry making. He "grew up" at his family's Mystic machine shop, Durant Machine Company, and began fashioning jewelry there while still in junior high school. A little later, he moved beyond just metal.

He says, "I didn't know anything about gems, but I had a friend who worked in the gem trade in New York. My introduction, at 16, was a private tour of Harry



ROBB DARULA WORKS ON A PIECE OF CUSTOM-MADE JEWELRY AT HIS MYSTIC STUDIO. HE DESIGNS, CUTS AND FINISHES RINGS, PENDANTS, NECKLACES AND OTHER SELECTIONS, PAYING ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS ON THE FRONT AND BACK OF A PIECE TO MAKE IT UNIQUE. PHOTOS BY JEFF EVANS



## JUST THE FACTS

**Name** From Earth to Art

**Address** 248 Noank Road, Mystic

**Hours** Make an appointment to visit anytime

**Phone** 860-536-0452

**Web site** www.fromearthtoart.com

Winston, top to bottom. My mom had to buy me a suit!"

That's when he knew he wanted to attend the Gemological Institute of America (GIA) in Santa Monica, Calif. So he hurried along his high school education, earning all his necessary credits by the end of his junior year. The GIA, however, urged him to stay at Fitch High School a little longer.

"So they created a program for me in my senior year, an advanced arts program," says Robb. "I just spent all day in the arts department painting or sculpting or making jewelry. I'm very happy I spent 12th grade doing that."

After achieving his G.G. (Graduate Gemologist) designation from GIA, Robb stayed in California for a few years and eventually wound up back in Mystic after a stop in Rhode Island, where he studied stone sculpture at the Rhode Island School of Design.

His other travels included a trip to Bali to work with native masters of stone crafting and many trips to Tanzania to prospect in prehistoric riverbeds and volcano pipes for tanzanite, garnets, sapphires, tourmaline and rubies ... giving true meaning to the name he gave his studio: From Earth to Art.

He explains, "Bringing stones from the ground through the cutting and the design to become wearable pieces of art. That's the concept of From Earth to Art."

Robb's trips to Tanzania are less frequent. He's formed enough partnerships there — and in places like Brazil and Tahiti — to acquire most of the stones he uses in his jewelry. Those partnerships also allowed him to form another company, JUA Gem, through which he wholesales gems to jewelers around the world.

But his passion is clearly in the creation of unique pieces, fueled by those gems.

"Usually, I always start with a gem and it tells me where to go, what the piece will be like," he says. "I try to use fine stones, and they become an inspiration. And I like to start with the centerpiece. I'll set that first to honor the stone. Then I kind of wing it from there. Sometimes I sketch it out but a lot of times I just work with the (molding) wax."

"He works it like a painter would use a canvas," says his customer Shelly. "In fact, he didn't like the cut of the amethyst I gave him, so he actually re-cut it to give it more life. I saw it and didn't know it was the same stone. It's so much more beautiful than when I gave it to him."

And that's all he wants.

"I love the art and creating these pieces, but if you're going to enjoy it after I've made it, that's the icing on the cake."