

Serendipity *locally* MADE

Our second annual round-up of diverse products made close to home in Fairfield and Westchester counties confirmed one thing: This area is truly rich with brilliant and ambitious entrepreneurs. Here is just a small taste of their incredible and inspiring talent.

BY MOLLY CALHOUN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY HOLLIE BERTRAM





CUSTOM REMOVABLE
WALLPAPER, \$110
PER ROLL

FOOSIE DESIGN

BRIDGEPORT, CT

Founded by: Erin LaFavor, 2008
foosiedesign.com

After graduating from college in 2001 as a graphic design major, Cos Cob native Erin LaFavor got her start at an advertising agency in Wilton, CT. "I loved being around creative people," she says. But feeling advertising wasn't the right fit, she decided to go to interior design school and got a job at Kate's Paperie on Greenwich Avenue, often doing wedding invitation design on the side. LaFavor eventually moved to Seattle, and in 2008 she started her own custom stationery and invitation business on Etsy. Foosie Design is what LaFavor calls "a homegrown 'art to life' design studio." ("Foosie" is a nod to her

family in Northern Ireland, who refer to dessert as "a foosie." "I wanted my products to be sweet and exciting, so it made total sense," she says.) As online stationery sites became more popular, the invitation industry shifted and LaFavor had to adapt. So last year, she started making pillows and illustrating wallpaper in modern, fresh designs. "My aesthetic is really inspired by my time in the Pacific Northwest," says LaFavor, who has returned to Fairfield County. "It tends to be hipster, bohemian, and even classic." She hopes to start working with more stores and interior designers. "From there, the sky's the limit."

PILLOWS, FROM \$75



TEXTIIL

STAMFORD, CT

Founded by: Sally Weinberg, 2011
textiil.com

When her husband's job moved their family to Kuala Lumpur in 2008, Hamden, CT, native Sally Weinberg quickly realized their two-year stint in southeast Asia was not just an adventure, but a business opportunity. "I wanted to bring the beautiful artisan-made fabrics I saw—like batik and songket—to a broader stage, and employ people locally when we came back to Fairfield County." While having no previous textile experience and not speaking the local languages would intimidate some, Weinberg, a former marketing executive, was unfazed: "I've done a lot of work for early-stage

businesses where the rules aren't yet defined, and that's always been the fun for me." Now, through her company, Textiil, Weinberg designs pillows and throws with fabrics she sources from Malaysia and Indonesia (they're fabricated in Danbury and Bethel, CT). You could say she's made global local. And it's the authenticity and conscious consumerism of Textiil that drives her. "There's great beauty in knowing that something has been made by hand by another human being," she says. Textiil merchandise is sold locally at Back 40 Mercantile in Old Greenwich, CT, and through the Houzz marketplace.

RAUS COFFEE
STAMFORD, CT
Founded by: Donny Raus, 2010
rauscoffee.com

One of Donny Raus' earliest memories is of his grandmother making espresso on the stove. "Even then, I saw coffee as a way of bringing people together," he says. After working at Starbucks in college, Raus took a job in corporate finance. "I had an espresso machine and coffee maker in my office; it basically became the break room," he says. He eventually left the corporate world and in 2010, he starting selling his coffee at the Westport farmers market, where he required customers to do an "activation ritual" before drinking his espresso to mix it. "I tell people to move their hips in a circle before they drink it," he says. "They laugh but they always do it, and they leave smiling!" Cold Roman, Raus' signature drink (sold at gourmet grocers throughout Fairfield County), is a natural-flavor-infused, ready-to-serve refrigerated espresso in a bottle. The benefit, Raus says, is that you can prepare it how you want—cold, warm, black, with milk...or in a martini.



ESPRESSO, \$21

SLIDE BELTS, FROM \$50



METAL SHOP CT
WESTPORT, CT

Founded by: Jon Fontane, 2013
metalshopct.com

Jon Fontane is what you might call a true guy's guy. Case in point: He previously worked in sports marketing, and sold and installed racecar simulators. So it's not exactly a stretch that the Westport resident started Metal Shop CT, a company whose signature aesthetic is rugged, with products that "reflect a bygone era." Take, for instance, Metal Shop's slide belts, which are beautiful in their simplicity. The buckles are made with steel, copper, brass or anodized aluminum that's machined in Norwalk, and then Fontane does all the hand-finishing and patina work. The belts are simple cotton webbing or leather. "My goal is to create vintage products with a modern flair," he says. Fontane even ran a Kickstarter campaign last year for the shop's vintage-inspired "bullet pencils," which are essentially aluminum remakes of pencil holders popular in the 1930s, 40s and 50s. Some of his other products include bottle openers, key chains and notebook cases. Next on the horizon? Fontane plans to create a pocket watch and reinvent a WWII utility belt. But no matter how big the company grows, he knows that he'll always keep production local. "I'm really committed to the small-batch, made-in-America movement."

SHEA AND COCOA BUTTER HANDMADE SOAP, \$8



NOD HILL SOAP

WILTON, CT

Founded by: Catherine Romer, 2009
nodhillsoap.com

As the only woman in a house full of men—she's married and has two grown sons—Catherine Romer had received fancy soaps as presents for years. "It was their go-to gift, and I adored getting them," she says, "but it never occurred to me that soap was something I could make." After some online research, her first attempt was to make something called "grocery store soap," and that had her hooked. "I made hundreds of versions of different cold-processed soaps before I was able to find the perfect combinations," Romer says of her creations, which are made with various oils and butters. "I had to relearn basic chemistry." Within months, she started packaging it and giving it to

friends, and she was soon selling at farmers markets all over Fairfield County. Now she has a store in Wilton, and the resourceful mom does all her own Web design, labeling, and packaging. "Everything I do with my business is my girlie outlet," she says. "I want my products to be feminine and elegant." Romer has been so successful that her line has expanded to lotions, scrubs and even all-natural insect repellent. Fittingly, the origin of her company's name is as local as the products themselves. "There's a road in Wilton called Nod Hill Road," she says. "It's beautiful, hilly and classic New England. I wanted my company to reflect something local."

RY'S RUFFERY

NORWALK, CT

Founded by: Ryan Kelly, 2011
rysuffery.com

Daniela Kelly says she suspected her son was going to be an entrepreneur from when he was young. It didn't take long for her to find out she was right. When Ryan was just 10 years old, the family got Barkley, a rescue Beagle mix puppy, and Ryan thought the dog biscuits they'd bought at the store smelled disgusting. So he set out to make a healthier, nicer-smelling alternative. He took money he'd earned doing chores to buy dog treat cookbooks, and he spoke with Barkley's veterinarian for guidance on ingredients. Soon, he was selling dog biscuits he'd made at Pet Valu in Stamford, CT, and giving 25 percent of his sales to Stamford Animal Rescue (now called STARelief and Pet

Assistance). "He's so determined," Daniela says. "People have seen Ryan out in the rain and snow selling his product." At age 11, he was asked to appear on ABC's show *Shark Tank*, where he earned a coveted investment from real estate mogul Barbara Corcoran. The rest, as they say, is history. These days, Ryan's biscuits are sold at supermarket chain Wegmans and are in 1,300 PetSmart Stores. "Having a company started after him hasn't gone to Barkley's head, but it has gone to his stomach," Ryan says. "He's gained a little weight, but we love him no matter what."

DOG TREATS, \$9.50





STONEHILL DESIGN
FAIRFIELD, CT
Founded by: Jason Aleksa, 2013
stonehill-design.com

On weekdays, Jason Aleksa works in operations for an investment bank. But on weekends, he culls flea markets, garage sales and eBay for vintage pieces to create unique, industrial lamps. "I've always been a hands-on person—I'll see something and think about how I could probably make it better," he says. And that's exactly what he sets out to do. Aleksa takes items that have been discarded—vintage speakers, radios, rusting kerosene lamps—and brings them back to their former glory, but lit up—literally—in an unexpected way. He also takes custom requests. "People often have items from grandparents or they have something they found and always intended to get fixed up," he says. "I give things new life and purpose." For example, there's the lamp he made from an old Kodak Duaflex camera, or the one he made from an L.C. Smith and Corona typewriter. Whatever the upcycled piece, he's clearly got an eye for cool. Aleksa sells his creations in his Etsy shop as well as at Black Rock farmers market in Bridgeport, CT. And he hopes to continue to create for years to come. "My dad had a heat treating business growing up and he can pretty much make anything," he says. "It gave me a true appreciation of what it takes to work with your hands."

TALL GLASS DOME
EDISON LAMP, \$149



PUSH POPS, \$3;
PINTS, \$8

PENNY LICK ICE CREAM

HASTINGS-ON-HUDSON, NY
Founded by: Ellen Sledge, 2013
pennylickicecream.com

Ellen Sledge decided to start her ice cream company at 2 a.m. one night in February 2013. "I had two kids with the stomach flu and my son had broken his foot," she says. "There had been endless blizzards...I was sitting at the table like a desperate lunatic." She laughs looking back on it, with good reason: Her late-night epiphany, Penny Lick Ice Cream, has flourished. She began by selling ice cream at farmers markets, and this summer she's opening a small factory and storefront in Hastings-on-Hudson. Sledge—a pastry chef who attended the French Culinary Institute and worked at Picholine, Jacques

Torres Chocolates and The River Café in NYC—believes in making old-fashioned, custard-based ice cream with simple, local ingredients: heavy cream, cream-topped whole milk, eggs and sugar. She has a knack for creating mouth-watering flavors like blackberry mint, toasted almond toffee and Ethiopian macchiato, inspired by her youngest daughter, who is adopted from Ethiopia. "The best part of my job is that it makes kids happy," Sledge says. "I'm famous among five-to-eight-year-olds! When I have my cart, kids shout at me from down the street; they all want to have playdates with me. It's so wonderful."



JAMES N. MCKEAN NEW
YORK 2015 VIOLIN,
\$22,000

JAMES MCKEAN VIOLINS

YORKTOWN HEIGHTS, NY
Founded by: James McKean, 2004
mckeanviolins.com

Consider Jim McKean's early résumé: He was a self-proclaimed "bad musician"; he flunked orchestra class in college; and he was fired from his first violin-making job. Despite the seemingly rocky start, today McKean is a tremendously successful violinmaker whose pieces are performed on by famous musicians worldwide. That success, he says, is founded in his passion for music and his dedication. "A violin is made of 120 pieces," he says. "You use experience and intuition to put it together to get the complex sound you want. It's intriguing and beautiful." And beautiful is exactly how you'd describe McKean's violins, violas and

cellos, which he makes in his Westchester County shop. Since leaving college in 1973 to go to violin-making school, the Chappaqua native has spent years restoring and dealing instruments, and devoting countless hours to his craft. He makes six to eight instruments per year out of wood he sources from Bosnia, Germany and the Italian Alps. McKean is a romantic when describing why he loves what he does: "I'm making it possible for a musician to find their voice," he says. "When a person bonds with an instrument, they can't stop playing it. That to me is the most wonderful thing."



BLANKETS, \$165

Business partners Lori Slater and Stefanie Zeldin have a sweet “how they met” story: “Our husbands were college buddies,” Slater says. Their connection proved fortuitous, what with Zeldin’s background in sustainable textiles, and Slater’s background in retail and interior design. Together they created In2Green, an “ecoluxury” company that makes colorful, Earth-friendly home furnishings with a modern feel. The women were early adopters of a process in which salvaged cotton clippings are sorted and mechanically refiberized back into colored thread. In2Green uses this upcycled yarn from mills in the tristate area to create high-end throws, as well as baby and pet products. They’ve even started manufacturing custom throws for the hospitality industry. Slater—who does product design—is a “blog and magazine hound” who draws inspiration from the runway. “It has been amazing to realize our dream along with having flexibility for our families,” she says. “The best part is, our company has grown organically—it has evolved from taking Polaroids to having more than 50 throw designs and a 40-page catalog.” Locally, you can find In2Green products at a variety of stores, including Back 40 Mercantile and Hoagland’s in Greenwich, CT.

IN2GREEN
YONKERS, NY
Founded by: Lori Slater and Stefanie Zeldin, 2006
in2green.com

Founded by: Lori Slater and Stefanie Zeldin, 2006
in2green.com



BRITTLE, \$14 (FOR 6 OUNCES), COCONUT MACAROONS, \$20 (FOR 13), CHOCO CHUNK COOKIES, \$22 (FOR 13)

CONNECTICUT COOKIE COMPANY

BRIDGEPORT, CT

Founded by: Andrea Greene, 2010
ctcoco.com

For nearly 20 years, Cincinnati native Andrea Greene has designed for big fashion brands, including Ralph Lauren, Abercrombie & Fitch and Club Monaco. In 2002, she started baking as a hobby, and she’d spend her commute from Connecticut to NYC planning how to start her own cookie company. “I’d use my friends and coworkers as guinea pigs,” she says. She knew she was onto something, though, when she reinvented her mom’s recipe for what she calls “Quick Fix” (an almond toffee brittle made with dark chocolate, graham crackers and sea salt). She took it to a Christmas party, and the plate was empty within minutes. So, Greene started going to networking

events for entrepreneurs, and in 2010 she officially started selling her cookies. The foundation of her business, Greene says, is her vanilla, which she modeled after vanilla she found in her grandmother’s hometown in Indiana. Today, Connecticut Cookie Company boasts a variety of treats, including toffee chunk and oatmeal raisin cookies, as well as gluten-free macaroons, and of course, Quick Fix brittle. Greene’s cookies are sold at local stores such as Palmer’s Market and Kirby and Company in Darien. And for now, she still multitasks and keeps busy on her commute. “I do all our social media while I’m on the train,” she says.

LANCE WOVENS

NORWALK, CT

Founded by: Stefano Bruni and Anne Arnold, 2011
lancewovens.com

For 25 years, Stefano Bruni—who’s originally from Modena, Italy—has made and sold leather for fashion industry clients such as Gucci, Prada and Calvin Klein. But it wasn’t until he met Anne Arnold that they started to source leather for their own purposes. “We wanted to create our own things, not just supply them,” Arnold says. So the now-engaged couple started Lance Wovens, a company that produces bags and handwoven leather goods for the home. Their first product? Woven leather pillows that were picked up by Bergdorf Goodman. Then, for a trade show, Arnold asked Bruni to create some woven leather tote bags to carry samples around in. Some people saw them underneath the table, and

“it was like a feeding frenzy,” Bruni says. The company, which makes products in Norwalk, Bethel and abroad, now features a variety of woven leather goods, from benches to table mats. They describe their weaves as equal parts rugged and refined. “Things have to be practical, not just beautiful,” Bruni says. The company’s namesake is Lance, a 12-year-old English Springer Spaniel, who joins Arnold and Bruni at the office every day. “The UPS and FedEx guys give him tons of cookies, so he loves to come to work,” Bruni says.

RIBBONS IPAD CASE IN BOUGAINVILLE, \$150 AND RIBBONS MINI TOTE IN LIME, \$525



EBONY BANGLE AND
CUFF BRACELETS
ACCENTED WITH 14
KARAT YELLOW GOLD,
PRICES UPON REQUEST



ASHLEY FOX COLLECTION

GREENWICH, CT

Founded by: Ashley Fox, 2014
ashleyfoxcollection.com

With a history that includes working in Sotheby's jewelry department and at estate jeweler Camilla Dietz Bergeron on Madison Avenue, Ashley Fox has cultivated a skill set that spans all parts of the business—from designing and making fine and fashion jewelry to sourcing estate pieces. "I started my own business because I really wanted to sell things that I love and would wear myself," she says. Fox, who grew up in Greenwich, CT, creates bold pieces made from a variety of materials, including gold, horn, mother of pearl, carved onyx, coral and of course, diamonds.

"My collection is all about unique pieces that ignite a woman's beauty inside and out," she says. Fox has designed everything from chic, oversized horn necklaces to glamorous, sparkly chandelier earrings. One of her absolute favorite parts of her job, though, is acting as a liaison for those looking to buy their loved ones jewelry. "I love scheming," she says, referencing the countless engagement rings and birthday surprises she's made. "I love knowing the excitement a woman is going to feel when she realizes the effort and sentiment someone who loves her has put into it."

SALT WATER FISH RUBBINGS

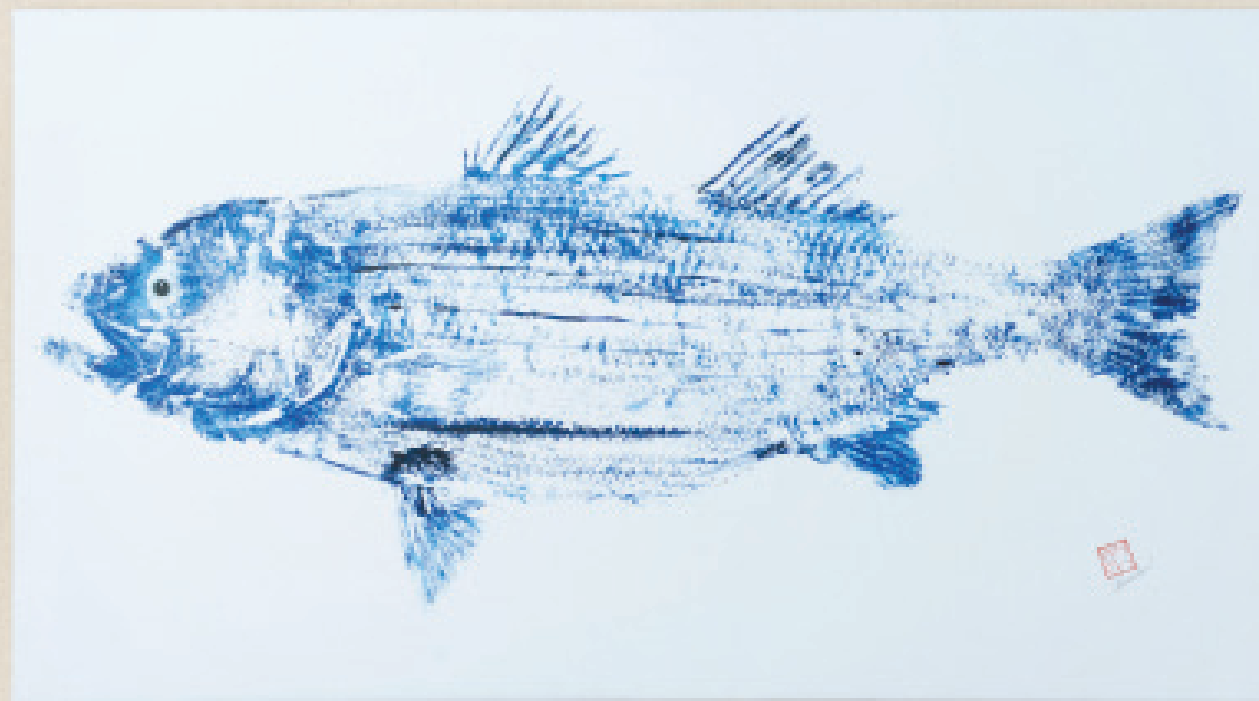
ROWAYTON, CT

Founded by: Joanne Gray, 2012
saltwaterfishrubbings.com

Having someone bring her a dead fish is a common occurrence for Joanne Gray. That's because the Cornwall, England, transplant started making fish rubbings three years ago after seeing them in Cape Cod. "I thought it was so cool," she says. So, she set about learning a technique known as gyotaku, a Japanese method dating back to the 1800s that was a means for fishermen to record their catches. How it works: First, she dries the fish and sponges on block printing paint; then she uses rice paper or fabric to make a rubbing. The at times comical nature of her process isn't lost on Gray. There was the time she did a rubbing of an octopus ("It came frozen and I had to blowdry it."). Or the

time she strolled into Pagano's Seafood in Norwalk requesting something "different". "They gave me a John Dory...it looks like a dinosaur." And then there are her loyal customers. ("I had to quickly do a rubbing of a fish a guy caught because he wanted it back to make a fish stew out of it.") Gray's business has caught on quickly, and now she designs T-shirts with her fish rubbings for Fjord Fisheries in Greenwich and Westport, CT and she sells her happy prints online and at her charming store, Seaside Delights, in Rowayton, CT. So what's she dying to get her hands on next? "Something big, like a swordfish."

BLUE STRIPER PRINT ON CANVAS, \$280



P-NUTTY CHIP AND ALMOND BRITTLE BAKED GRANOLA, \$10, GRAHAM BITES, \$8, FRESH HERB RAW CRACKERS, \$8



HEALING HOME FOODS

POUND RIDGE, NY

Founded by: Shelley Schulz, 2011
healinghomefoods.com

When Shelley Schulz's son was diagnosed with autism at age three, she committed to doing everything she could to help. So, the former Wall Streeter met with a nutritionist who suggested the Specific Carbohydrate Diet. "Everything improved within three days when I changed my son's diet," Schulz says. But she couldn't find products that met her standards. So, the determined mother decided to make his food—free of dairy, gluten and sugar—herself in her Pound Ridge, NY kitchen. "My business was started out of necessity," she says. When Schulz's husband was diagnosed with cancer the following year, she delved

deeper into creating gluten-free, raw and vegan foods, which she introduced at farmers markets. They were quickly embraced, and by 2013, Schulz moved production of her products—including baked and raw granola, raw crackers, nuts and graham bites—to a certified gluten-free commercial facility. Today, Schulz sources many ingredients from local farmers and seeks out the best ingredients. What she values most, though, is when customers say she's making a difference in their health. "My company started with meaning, and now it has meaning to other people," she says.

NECKTIES, \$98



GENERAL KNOT & CO

BEDFORD, NY

Founded by: Ann and Andrew Payne, 2010
generalknot.com

Ann and Andrew Payne spent years traveling back and forth to Asia to oversee production for iconic brands like Ralph Lauren, Levi's, Tommy Hilfiger and Original Penguin. Eager to make products in the U.S.—and to have direct customer feedback—they started General Knot & Co. in 2010. In the process, they traded SoHo for Bedford, NY to raise their two boys. "Having a studio at home is convenient but dangerous since we typically find ourselves working seven days a week," says Ann. The husband and wife team creates their collections around vintage and rare fabrics. "We've built up a terrific network of

professional collectors around the world who help us track down the types of items we're looking for," Ann says. "Some days it feels like we're searching for a needle in a haystack." But that careful attention to finding fabric—whether a 1940s plaid or a 1920s floral—makes every product unique. One particularly thriving part of their business: designing bespoke neckwear and accessories for weddings. "So many times couples are told 'no' or that what they want 'can't be done' by vendors," Ann says. "We try to always give them workable solutions so they get something they're really happy with."

AVM CASA

BRONXVILLE, NY

Founded by: Andrea Martins, 2014
avmcasa.com

For as long as she can remember, Andrea Martins has loved candles. And with her background in retail—at places such as Prada and Calvin Klein Home—she also knows the luxury market. It was Martha Stewart, though, who helped her marry the two and take her vision to the next level. Well, sort of. "I learned how to make candles from a Martha Stewart book called *Handmade Christmas*," she says. "It sounds funny, but I was obsessed." For years, the Brazil native turned Bronxville resident made them for friends and family in her kitchen as a way to wind down after work. In 2013, Martins'

daughter encouraged her to start her own business, and ultimately became a strong influence, too. "My daughter told me use soy wax because it's better for the environment and she's a vegetarian—and of course teenagers know everything," Martins says. With her daughter in charge of label design and social media, Martins began making and selling 100% soy wax candles infused with essential oils in more than 30 scents. One of the biggest parts of her business are custom orders for weddings and showers, and she recently expanded her line with lip balms, bath salts and soaps.



VOTIVE Candles, \$20

CHOCOLATIONS

MAMARONECK, NY
Founded by: Maria Valente, 2006
chocolations.com

Before she became a chocolate guru, Maria Valente worked as a lawyer and in computer training. "For a long time, making chocolate was a hobby," she says, "but I ultimately decided it was exactly what made me happy." In 2006 she enrolled at the French Culinary Institute, and later that year opened her store. Chocolations makes and sells glorious-and-sugary creations, from truffles to chocolate-covered potato chips to Rice Krispie cakes. A huge part of the business is molded chocolates for shower and party favors, which they can make in just about any shape. Valente once made a chocolate bust of a person's face from a silicone mold. "There's an element of challenge and creativity that's really fun," she says. Chocolations even has chocolate-bar and cupcake making parties. The whole Willy Wonka-esque world she's created stems from Valente's love of creating holiday sweets. "Our chocolate bunnies and houses we make for Easter and Christmas—they're just so happy and fun," she says.

CHOCOLATE BARK,
\$35 PER POUND,
BON BONS AND TRUFFLES,
\$1.95 EACH



SINGLE BAR RING,
SILVER, \$140; WIDE
SQUARE PUNCH RING,
GOLD, \$150; WIDE
SQUARE PUNCH CUFF,
GOLD, \$225; MEDIUM
SQUARE PUNCH CUFF,
SILVER, \$200

WHITE MOTH JEWELRY

WILTON, CT

Founded by: Tracey Heinemann, 2010
whitemothjewelry.com

Growing up in Wilton, CT, Tracey Heinemann would often take her mom's old jewelry to be redesigned. "My passion has always been in fashion, and my addiction has always been jewelry," she says. So after working in marketing and advertising—and realizing her heart just wasn't in it—in 2010, Heinemann started sourcing stones and vintage pieces and combining them with interesting chains. In 2013, her brand took on a more contemporary look as she sketched streamlined, architecturally inspired designs. "I'll see legs on a table or the shape of a faucet and love the way the metal is edged," she says. "I think about how I can take part of that shape and turn it into a bracelet or a cuff." Her pieces—made from cast brass and plated with 14 karat gold or rhodium—are intended to be worn with everything from jeans and a T-shirt to dressier outfits. And Heinemann's edgy-meets-classic aesthetic is born out of an inspiring philosophy. "I don't want women to forget the edge and inner strength they have. When women put it on, it makes them feel powerful. It's mood-defining." White Moth Jewelry is sold locally at Dovecote in Westport, CT and at Pimlico in New Canaan, CT.