

Nancy Schick Skinner

Beading for Therapy

For me, beads are a source of relaxation, enjoyment, and self-fulfillment and—depending on the bead—they have medicinal qualities.

My fascination with beads goes back to my earliest memories of my grandma who had a collection of silk clothing from the 1940s and 1950s. She had enhanced the collars and belts with beautiful, hand-sewn beaded designs.

During my youth I created many pieces of jewellery and other items using beads. Through the Hippie years, I found that adding beads to my torn bellbottom jeans and other items of clothing made a great statement and looked unique, as well. In recent years as a busy Notary Public, mother, and volunteer, I find creating with beads is a great diversion from the stress that sometimes surrounds me.

My quest to find beautiful and unusual beads is an activity I share with my husband, my sons, and various friends. It leads me to secondhand stores, antique stores, and fairs all over the Lower Mainland. What a great weekend activity!

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The excitement derived from finding a beautiful emerald-green antique crystal necklace or Chinese red glass beads containing flecks of gold, natural amber beads, or many other beautiful old and wonderful beads is a great source of joy and excitement.



My clients will quite often comment on my crystal bracelets and when they learn I have remade them from recycled jewellery, they bring me their mothers' jewellery they've been holding onto, waiting to give it to someone who would appreciate it.

Not everyone would be as thrilled as I am with such a gift. I always show my appreciation by making the client a bracelet using some of his or her mom's beads. I carefully take the antique jewelry apart and sort similar beads into separate small containers. A three-stranded crystal necklace from times past will be used to enhance or make many lovely pieces. It is sometimes possible to buy new crystal, glass, and natural stone beads but they lack the depth and life of the treasures I acquire.

My collection of beads is one of the most organized parts of my life. The red beads are in antique red cookie or candy tins; the blue beads of course are in the antique blue tins. All



the various beads are sorted, placed in small plastic bags, and kept in a special tin or tapestry bag, then placed on my antique tea wagon or in a series of antique leather suitcases. They serve as decorations in my bedroom. I do have a very understanding husband.

The finished pieces of jewellery are also displayed in my bedroom. The necklaces are hung on brass hooks from the top of the dresser mirror, the bracelets are placed in decorative antique cut-glass bowls on the dresser, and the earrings are displayed in a partitioned clear-plastic wall hanging.

Every day I choose which pieces I will wear to match my outfit or, quite often, my mood. Crystal gives me energy and therefore I always wear one piece or another containing crystal. The beautiful prisms created by the various colours and cuts of crystal are captivating. Many natural stones have healing, soothing, and other medicinal qualities. I wear my amber when I have extreme stress because amber creates an inner peace. If I believe it, it must be true.

Idle time for Nancy is not a good time. Creating jewellery and other items with my bead collection fills this void for me and soaks up excess energy. My sense of accomplishment and joy when a piece is finished is very fulfilling. There are just so many things to be made with beads. The jewellery is pretty and practical, too.

Costume jewelry from the 1950s and '60s is great fun to remake. From this era, I have leather rosebud beads, lacquered cranberry beads, vibrant and/or textured beads, and many other unusual beads. From a 2- or 3-strand necklace, I can make a 1-strand necklace, a pair of earrings, and 2 bracelets. Natural stone beads are great for threading on leather or silk cord. They make a wonderful gift for the males in my life.

Metallic beads are among the very few beads I purchase new. My family and friends all believe the bracelets I have made from those beads assist in arthritic (and other) pain relief. The many shapes and colours of metallic beads adorn wrists nicely, as well.

My large collection of clip-on earrings has been put to good use when making Christmas tree decorations. Crystals and other glass added to green pipe cleaners catch the lights on the tree beautifully.

Lately, I have been making window hangings as housewarming gifts for friends from bent and designed metal coat hangers, with crystal beads and chandelier prisms hanging in strands. Sun shining through the window on them fills the entire room with delightful, lovely bouncing colours. The most energetic project to date is the leather picture I made for my sister as a wedding gift by sewing hundreds of glass beads onto it in the shape of a butterfly.



As you may have realized by now, I am passionate about my beading. There are so many more beads to discover and so many more things to create with them. I have lots of ideas and so far, not enough time. My goal is to buy a glass kiln and start making my own beads, in time.

This is a hobby for me. I suspect that to create beaded items to sell would not bring the same excitement and contentment I currently enjoy. I don't think I will quit my day job as a BC Notary Public, which I also enjoy.

Creating with beads certainly helps create a good balance in my life. ▲

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