

It's a Never-Ending Holiday *Holiday* at Diving Cat Studio and Gallery

By Susan I. Shiber
Photography by Kelly O'Keefe

How aged must an institution be to qualify for landmark significance? If it's Diving Cat Studio and Gallery, not even two years old.

As the daringly different shop plunges into the holiday season, it has much to celebrate. Owner Markels Roberts bought Diving Cat's Bridge Street home, experienced a 60 percent sales increase in record time, and became a destination point for works of handmade artistic character. No surprise. Roberts herself achieved legendary status shortly after introducing her sculpture and flame-worked jewels to craft show audiences several years ago.

"I have regular patrons and a whole new group of loyal customers who come to Diving Cat," says Roberts. "It doesn't matter how bad the weather, they come. I have tons of orders and can't produce flame-work cat pendants fast enough."

Roberts credits the operations end of her success to business manager John MacPhee. "I opened with no business plan and not a whit of bookkeeping knowledge," she confesses. "John makes it possible for me to do my art and select pieces for the store. He is an ever-present smiling face, who greets customers and on occasion, stains pottery. One out-of-



Above: This year, one of Markels' holiday signature pieces is a personification of her passionate imagination. She fancied bits and pieces of glitter rising from a struggling economy and created the Recession Phoenix that marries clay with glass. With uplifted beak and a crown of hope, the bird represents brightness and good times.



Left: As Markels Roberts' shop plunges into the holiday season, it has much to celebrate. She bought Diving Cat's Bridge Street home, experienced a 60 percent sales increase in record time, and became a destination point for works of handmade artistic character.

state visitor specifically returned to buy something because of his kindness."

There's always a surprise behind the prodigious hanging puss. Roberts in the window demonstrating flame-working and firing beads in the nearby glass kiln. A pair of Coton de Tulear pups holding court on antique chairs while their owner shops. Pottery students enjoying wine and cozy chatter.

Right: Markels confides, "I can't produce flame-work cat pendants fast enough."

Most magical of all is the merchandise. This year, there are two holiday signature pieces. The first is a personification of Roberts' passionate imagination. She fancied bits and pieces of glitter rising from a struggling economy and created the *Recession Phoenix* that marries clay with glass. With uplifted beak and a crown of hope, the bird represents brightness and good times.

"*Recession Phoenix* is somewhat Seussical," notes Roberts. "Theodor Seuss Geisel (Dr. Seuss),



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who is one of my heroes, was a very talented artist. His work is so free, so colorful. These birds are like that, and people are clamoring to order them. Don't worry, there will be a fully feathered flock in time for gift-giving."

The second holiday limited edition is a ceramic tree of life abloom with hundreds of glass leaves. "It's actually a variation of a display piece," explains Roberts. "Customers urged me to sell the tree right out from under the jewelry, and when I saw how beautiful the birds look, I decided to embellish limbs with glass. Put it out as a Thanksgiving centerpiece or in a bedroom to show off necklaces and bracelets."

Diving Cat has a bountiful body of possibilities to hang on that tree. Pendants, dog bone bracelets, and custom beaded jewelry by Roberts are as exquisite as they are original. New this fall is bold regal purple jade that dazzles on sterling silver chains. "I adore these clunky faceted stones," extols Roberts. "They're more substantial than traditional jade."



Jewelry designer Jennifer Brower is almost as popular as Roberts. Inspired by nature, she weaves and coils single threads of silver into rings, earrings, bracelets, necklaces, and chain mail creations. Cynthia Chuang whips up whimsy



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from porcelain and metal. Butterflies, snails, and gaping mouth salamanders jump to attention. An array of honeybees, pussy willows, and cherry-filled colanders from Chickenscratch put personality on any lapel. Intricately set gemstones from all over the world are Philippe Marcou's specialty and among Diving Cat favorites.

Other coveted objects of art range from fashion to function. Reversible fleece jackets by Winding River are resplendent in chic geometric patterns, contemporary tapestries,

and vibrant solid tones. "The Winding River women visited the store," says Roberts. "They gave me a free coat because they were sure Diving Cat was a match for their products. I wore it, and people followed me with compliments. Obviously, I added the line. The outerwear is a wonderful companion to One Wing Studio's sensuous silks."

Breathtaking hand-painted beaded scarves, cut velvet shawls, and soignée hats from House of Paulina are gifts for anyone who appreciates sophisticated originality. There's even something for babies of those worldly women. The Baby Bunch™ gift boxes include two onesies, a t-shirt, bib, and two pairs of socks arranged in floral-like bouquets.

Platters, plates, and stemware in pottery and glass grace tables with a style of artisan distinction. Colors of the earth melt together in masterful stoneware from Kerry Brooks and serving trays by Roberts. Exotic pictures blended of nature-painted sands from around the world change with the turn of a swivel for endless mystique. Add hand-forged glass tapers and lifelike botanicals for a holiday home that commands attention.

"Diving Cat carries a vast assortment reflecting my taste," remarks Roberts. "I'm so happy that people love the collections as much as I do. I look forward to sharing them at the store and in our annual holiday show." •

Save the Date
*Annual Diving Cat Studio
and Gallery Holiday Show*

November 28th & 29th
10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Montgomery School
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