

In her South End workshop (bottom), Kristina Pitaniello crafts rings, bracelets, and belts whose organic designs and rustic materials are proving equally popular with women and men.



"MASCULINE FORMS ARE LESS REFINED; A FEMININE FORM IS DELICATE AND MORE COMPLEX—JUST LIKE WOMEN AND MEN."

—KRISTINA PITANIELLO

Real Men Wear Silver

THE SOUTH END'S KRISTINA PITANIELLO CUSTOM-DESIGNS MACHO BAUBLES. BY JULIET IZON

Kristina Pitaniello was a hard-core tomboy as a kid, so it's a tad surprising that she grew up to become one of the most imaginative jewelry designers in Boston. But those rough-and-tumble childhood instincts serve her well today as an artisan. "My grandfather Louis was a carpenter and taught me how to draw and some things about craftsmanship," Pitaniello says. "I still remember everything he taught me."

And while she loved jewelry and art from a young age, her parents "didn't encourage an artistic life," she notes. It wasn't until Pitaniello had graduated from the University of New Hampshire and moved to the South End that she was able to focus on her passion for design: "I surrounded myself with other artists. I launched my first jewelry line at 21, and by 23 I was a working jeweler with a studio." The first pieces were rings, which she sold to friends, but soon stores were snapping them up after seeing them at the influential New York Gift Show. Now celebrities such as Julia Roberts and Karen O wear her jewelry, and her belts and belt buckles are proving especially popular with men.

"Masculine forms are the easiest to make," Pitaniello says. "They're reduced and less refined; a feminine form will be delicate and more

complex—just like women and men, I guess." Many of her bracelets and rings for men feature deep-red and blue leathers with sleek silver accents; some are engraved with single words, like "truth" or "listen." Her belt buckles—often organic-looking in design and made from hammered metal—are paired with distressed leather belts. "I keep it rough and simple," she explains.

Pitaniello finds inspiration in nature most of all, citing rocks, bugs, even seeds as fodder for her creations. "All design is derivative from natural shapes," she says, "but I feel ideas are shared unconsciously among artists—all creativity is spiritual." As for the stones she uses, diamonds are among her preferred mediums: "As building blocks of the earth, they have a certain infinite and eternal cellular intelligence." And she believes they can be beneficial for the wearer as well. "Stones magnify a person's specific energy," she says. "People do know the magic of stones on some unconscious level."

While Pitaniello travels often to source materials, she always relishes returning to Boston: "The South End is amazing. It's charming and beautiful. I love every part of it." *By appointment only; pitaniello.com* **BC**