

DEON SMITH:

From Pediatrician to Pioneer in Sustainable Jewelry Design

Interview by Zita Suliman



In a world where fashion is often dictated by fleeting trends, Deon Smith's jewelry stands out as a testament to timeless beauty and personal expression. A former pediatrician turned jewelry designer, Smith's transition into the fashion industry is as unexpected as it is inspiring. His designs are deeply rooted in a desire to create pieces that are not only visually stunning but also meaningful—reflecting his belief in individuality and sustainability.

Smith's journey into the world of jewelry design began 15 years ago, when he created bespoke pieces for his wife, whose avant-garde taste in jewelry he found difficult to satisfy in mainstream stores. What started as an occasional hobby turned into a full-fledged passion after his retirement, driven by a desire to cater to fashion-conscious individuals looking for something truly unique. Smith's pieces are not just adornments but conversation starters, allowing wearers to express themselves and tell their own stories.

Deon Smith never planned on becoming a jewelry designer. In fact, his life began on an entirely different path—he spent 25 years as a pediatrician, running a private practice in Cape Town. But in 2018, everything changed. At 55, Smith decided to retire early to care for his wife, who had been diagnosed with leukemia. His retirement plans initially involved writing a book on South African glassware, one of his many passions, but a chance conversation with a long-time goldsmith sparked a new journey. After years of designing custom jewelry for his wife, Smith was encouraged to take his designs seriously. This nudge led him to launch his own brand, Deon Smith Jewellery, which has since become a celebrated name in sustainable luxury, combining his love for nature, antiques, and storytelling.

From recycled silver to indigenous woods, Smith's first collection, the Botanical Collection, drew inspiration from Cape Town's extraordinary Fynbos flora. His designs have garnered international attention, leading to features in several



publications. Now, with his latest Lignum Collection, Smith is transforming wood into a statement material, reflecting his passion for sustainability and environmental consciousness. Despite launching a new career later in life, Smith's creativity and dedication have made him a powerful voice in the world of sustainable fashion.

At the heart of Smith's creative process is his love for natural beauty. He crafts his jewelry from sustainable materials, ensuring that each piece aligns with his eco-conscious values. "The materials I use speak to the vulnerability and beauty of nature," Smith explains. This focus on sustainability is a protest against fast fashion—a sector that has concerned him for its emphasis on cheap, rapidly changing trends. Smith's jewelry is designed to be timeless, to transcend seasons and remain relevant for years to come. Among his most innovative creations is a collection inspired by punctuation marks, which he views as symbols of personal expression, much like tattoos. Smith's jewelry allows wearers to convey a message in a subtle, yet profound way, using everyday symbols to make a statement.

For Smith, fashion is about more than

wherever he goes.

His journey into jewelry design has been met with intrigue, especially given his background as a pediatrician. "I was worried I'd be laughed at for starting a new career at my age," he admits, but the international recognition he's received has only confirmed that he made the right choice. Smith's fascination with antiques plays a significant role in his work. A planned book on South African glass antiques was shelved in favor of jewelry design, but his love for history still finds its way into his creations. "I've recently incorporated 18th-century antiques into my designs," he shares, describing pieces that merge his passion for the past with his modern-day jewelry work. These pieces, which feature found objects, are a natural extension of his creative process and his belief in sustainability.

His latest collection, inspired by punctuation marks and patchwork materials, serves as a protest against fast fashion. "It's okay to wear something that isn't 'of the moment.' Fashion should be about sustainability and longevity, not instant gratification." Smith is also



exploring the integration of poetry into his designs, with a line inspired by the works of Emily Dickinson. This innovative combination of words and jewelry adds a deeply personal touch, creating pieces that resonate on an emotional level.

Smith's dedication to creating sustainable, meaningful jewelry is unwavering. His next project, a collection inspired by patchwork and slow fashion, seeks to challenge the disposable nature of modern clothing and accessories. For Smith, each piece of jewelry should be more than just an accessory—it should be a keepsake, something that tells a story and holds personal significance.

As Deon Smith continues to push the boundaries of design, his work stands as a symbol of empowerment and sustainability. His jewelry invites wearers to embrace their individuality, celebrate their personal stories, and challenge the fast-paced nature of the fashion industry. In a world where trends come and go, Smith's designs promise to remain timeless, treasured for years to come.

