



# From patent attorney to jewelry designer

By Mary Welch

If it weren't for a bad case of mold, Cindy Joffe would still be a patent and trademark attorney. But a severe illness caused her to take a medical leave and, in the process, discovered a previously undetected artistic side that she showcases in Avindy, a successful jewelry design business she shares with her mother.



Photography by Joseph Wong

“After Emory law, I joined Kilpatrick & Stockton and really enjoyed working at the firm,” Cindy says. “I love my clients, my co-workers, the firm. I have great memories, but I started getting sick, really sick, and we couldn't figure it out.”

Turns out it was mold in her house, and she took a two-month medical leave and with her husband moved out of her house and into her parents' home. Her mother, Avril Joffe, was transitioning out of her business, Avril Exclusives, a car-wash business. “I was



wanting out of that, and Cindy's husband was starting to take over the business,” the South African native says. “I always designed jewelry – hippie sort of jewelry – when we would go up to our house in the Blue Ridge Mountains. I used lots of beads.”

To help give Cindy something to do while recuperating, Avril offered her some beads and other materials, and Cindy started messing around making jewelry. “I never had any artistic talent,” she says. “My mother was more artsy, not me.”

“I just wanted to keep her occupied

– keep her mind off things,” Avril says. “She moved in for what was going to be a few weeks and turned out to be a year while they fixed their house up and Cindy recovered.”

The mother-and-daughter team soon found themselves with a new hobby, and when Cindy returned to Kilpatrick & Stockton she wore her designs. “People really liked them, and I started selling them.”

Others started complimenting her creations – and wanting to buy them – so they bought \$400 worth of stones and starting making jewelry. A friend offered to have a trunk show in her house, and it was hugely successful. “We made something like \$7,000 that night, and more people wanted to have more shows for us,” Cindy says.

Still, it was a nice sideline until Cindy called her mother from Kilpatrick & Stockton. “She said, ‘Mom, I think we really have a viable business here,’ ” Avril recalls. “She said we should go into business together. She said she couldn't keep selling jewelry to the law firm's partners in the bathroom.”

Backed by Avril's enthusiastic husband who told them to go for it, the new business team started. They went to Tucson, Ariz., and purchased \$5,000 worth of semi-precious stones and set to work. “I was so worried about spending \$5,000, I couldn't sleep,” Avril says. “I'd never have done it without Cindy.”

The two do their own designs and have their own styles. Cindy's style is more colorful with a degree of sophistication. Avril's is more the rustic look. After several more successful trunk shows, the pair was ready to tackle New York. A friend introduced them to the owner of Fragments, the premium high-end accessories showroom in the city. “They get 30 to 50 calls a day from designers wanting to meet them to show their collections,” says Cindy. “But we were lucky, and after we were introduced, they wanted to have us in their showroom. Getting into that showroom was huge. Then everything happened so fast, because they have all the right people going through their showrooms and the publicity machines. We suddenly were in the Saks Fifth Avenue catalog. Britney Spears was photographed wearing our earrings, and we were in the *Oprah* magazine. That was it!”

Today, they go to Tucson twice a year to purchase jewels and show their products in accessory and gift markets across the country. They are in 300 stores across the country as well as Japan, Canada and London. Locally, they are in several

stores, including Mooncake Clothing Co., Olive & Fig, B.D. Jeffries, Veronica's Attic and Sandpiper. They make about 25,000 pieces of jewelry a year from their studios off Huff Road, where six artists make the jewelry from their designs. Their jewelry has caught the eye of others. They were recently featured in *Ladies Home Journal* and on “The Today Show.” Martha Stewart has called, and they are waiting to hear if she wants them on her show.

“The key is to keep up with new designs so that our collections never look the same – or look like anyone else's,” Cindy says. Cindy keeps up more with the trends and colors that will be popular each season, while Avril manages more of the business. “We stay separate and do different things,” Avril says.

In fact, doing their own thing within the business may be a key to their success. Avril's husband once asked who was president. They both answered.

“I do more layered delicate pieces, while Cindy's are a bit bolder. But they both have a vintage but romantic feel at the same time.”

In fact, doing their own thing within the business may be a key to their success. Avril's husband once asked who was president. They both answered. “Cindy wasn't going to give up the president's title,” Avril says.

“Well, I spent my life with her bossing me around; I wasn't going to have it in my business as well,” Cindy counters.

Avril holds the title of CEO. “Cindy only consented when she realized the title meant nothing,” Avril says with a laugh.

Still, the women, Cindy in particular, recognize how far they have come.

“When I left Kilpatrick & Stockton and I would go to parties or meet other lawyers, they would ask me what I did for a living, and I would say I make jewelry,” she says. “And they would look at me like, ‘That's so cute.’ And I would say, ‘But I used to be an attorney. I used to have a brain.’ I really had to say that. I felt the need to say that.”

Well, she says, “We took a \$400 investment, and we expect to do \$1 million in business this year making and selling jewelry. It's great.” ♀

