



Treasure Hunter

Description

Put your feet up and meet Elena Chien, whose beautifully crafted jewelry always tells a story.

WORDS: Elga



A tiny leaf here, some fine stitching there, and rows upon rows of little electric-blue beads on gold-banded driftwood. Fine details are Elena Chien's cup of tea. A Los Angeles-based photographer, Chien has quite the following on Etsy for her jewelry line [See Real Flowers](#). Her eye is trained to recognize all things unique – she was taught by her Chinese grandfather to scour street markets – and that's evident in her delicately crafted necklaces and bracelets. She sources her materials, including vintage fabrics, from India, LA flea markets, and yes, her grandfather. Here she tells us more about her maker background and textile preferences:

Why the name See Real Flowers?

The name See Real Flowers comes from a Zen poem by Basho that I love.

Come, / see real flowers / of this painful world.

For me, this is about the depth and the emotional quality of beauty, a beauty that is much more complex than just a surface level appeal. I try to keep this in mind when creating and designing. I also design based on materials that I find, so many pieces are made in a limited quantity. Each piece has a story.

You say you're a born treasure hunter. What are your favorite places and what inspires you?

For materials and collecting, my favorite markets are in Morocco, India, and Oaxaca. They have the most beautiful and colorful textiles, beads, stones, leather, and talismans... anything and everything. For inspiration I look to traditional Japanese and Native American design.

What do you like about using textiles for your jewelry pieces?

I love the stories behind the textiles, like knowing where and how they were made. There is such a rich history of textile jewelry throughout the world, those used for amulets and talismans that bring luck or ward off evil. I like carrying on these sorts of traditions in a modern way. For example, the African Mudcloth Talisman from my collection is filled with California desert sage, thought by Native Americans to have cleansing and protective properties. This design will be a staple in my collections, changing each season with different textiles.

We're curious about your heritage. Can you tell us more and how it influences you?

My father's family emigrated from China during the revolution and my mother's family emigrated from the Netherlands through Ellis Island. Both

sides of our family encouraged my sister and I to learn the history and culture of our roots, raising us to feel connected to these cultures... Our parents also raised us to be travelers and to value the experience of being in a new foreign place. Travel – whether a road trip through the Southwest or a trip to the markets of India – is an integral part of my life and who I am.

At Fabrics Store, we're proud of our earth-friendly textiles. Do you apply the same eco-conscious approach to your creations?

Yes! It's so important to know where and how your textiles are made because the textile industry is currently one of the leading polluters in the world. I prefer to spend more on eco-friendly textiles because it supports people and companies that match my philosophy. I also try not to waste any of my fabrics, and most of the textiles I use in my jewelry are leftover scraps.

CATEGORY

1. LIFE LOVERS

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