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Lafayette entrepreneur creates unique jewelry inspired by love of water

By Kara Navolio



Resin jewelry designs by Marisa Tashima Photo Emma Coleman

Launching a business takes planning, smarts, creativity, and an entrepreneurial spirit. It's rare to find all those qualities in a 21-year-old. But Lafayette resident Marisa Tashima has done it with her own brand of jewelry, which she designs and creates herself.

Tashima's business name, Kainoa Designs, is Hawaiian for "endless sea." As a former Walnut Creek Aquanaut and synchronized swimmer for Stanford University, many of the designs are inspired by her love of the water and her family's connection to Hawaii.

The 2013 Acalanes graduate studied product design engineering at Stanford and graduated with her bachelor's degree this past June. Her major, which combines art and science, allowed her to take art classes as well as courses in manufacturing, engineering and design. She has always loved making things.

"I am passionate about sharing my artwork with a larger community," Tashima said. "I love creating jewelry and am inspired to see my craft worn and admired by others. Starting my own business was a daunting idea at the beginning, but once realizing that I could conquer it little by little, I was excited to face the challenge."

The pendants and earrings are made of resin, a type of substance that starts out as a liquid, then hardens into a clear plastic over a 24-hour period. Tashima embeds different materials in the resin to create unique looks. She usually starts with a background color by adding acrylic paint; then she layers things like iridescent paper, glitter, metal leaf, tiny shells, charms, and even candy sprinkles. With her Etsy shop and personal sales, she has sold over 100 pieces. Lafayette resident Mary Ilyin, who purchased a pendant, said, "The piece I purchased was beautiful and the packaging was clever and creative."

Tashima was inspired by fused glass jewelry and liked the vibrant colors and designs, but working with fused glass takes an investment in equipment that was prohibitive. She found that she could get a similar look using resin and taught herself to use it.

She plans to continue designing and making jewelry even as she pursues a career with a consumer product company in product design.

Her products can be found on Etsy (an online shopping website of handcrafted items) and retail for \$22-\$28.

Lafayette resident Carol Escajeda is a fan. "I gifted the rainbow earrings to my sister who lives in Iowa," she said. "On a recent visit she wore them every day, and I could see why, they're very eye-catching!"

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