BIG SUR GOLDSMITHS

THE LOOK · MMXXVI



THE STUDIO · BIG SUR, CALIFORNIA

Big Sur Goldsmiths

A family studio, founded in Big Sur in 1964.
Karl Lee started the work, and Carrie and Ali carry it on.

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE STUDIO

Karl Lee began this work in 1964, at the Esalen Art Barn in Big Sur. He had come to California with an art set and very little else, and he stayed. The bench later stood in a cabin on Partington Ridge, a cabin Henry Miller had lived in twenty years before. Karl worked at it until 2013.

Ali Lee was born on Partington Ridge and apprenticed at that bench in the 1980s. He trained as well with Kocek, a European trained master jeweler in Carmel. In time, his own bench stood next to his father's.

Carrie Armstrong came to the bench from sculpture and printmaking. Living life as art, she says. Metal smithing accentuates the ride. Her forms are bolder. The way of working is the same: alloy the gold, mill it, forge it by hand.

Nothing in the studio is cast, and nothing is repeated. The gold is old and recycled, high karat, melted and milled in the studio. Karl collected stones for fifty years, and some of the work is still set from that collection. Where a stone comes from his shelves, the piece says so.

The work has been carried at the Phoenix Shop at Nepenthe, in Big Sur, since the 1970s. Ali's mother kept him in a basket behind its register when he was a baby. Most of the work now leaves through the studio's own site.

Simple may look easy but it isn t.
Lasting may sound easy but it s not.

ON THE BIG SUR CLASSIC, BEGUN BY KARL LEE IN THE 1970S



The Fox Turquoise Grande Big Sur Classic.

AT A GLANCE

Founded	Big Sur, 1964, by Karl Lee
The makers	Carrie Armstrong and Ali Lee
The metal	Old and recycled high karat gold. Silver. Nothing cast.
The stones	Collected by Karl Lee over fifty years
The work	One of a kind. When it sells, it is not made again.
Find it	bigsurgoldsmiths.com · The Phoenix Shop at Nepenthe, Big Sur

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Perfect imperfection. The standard is exacting, and the hand still shows in the work. That is how you know a person made it.



Carrie Armstrong Design

Living life as art. Metal smithing accentuates the ride.

@CARRIEARMSTRONGDESIGN



LOOK 1

Ocean Jasper Ring

Ocean jasper, 9.8 carats, from the Karl Lee gem collection, sourced from the first vein off Madagascar. Set in 22k gold and framed by white diamonds, tsavorite garnets and padparadscha sapphires, on an 18k gold base and band.



LOOK 2

Spinel Medley Link Earrings

Teal to gray spinels, 2.8 carats, with Coober Pedy opals, rubies and white diamonds. 22k gold bezels, 18k gold ear wires and links, satin finish.



LOOK 3

Mandarin Garnet Ring

Spessartite garnet, 6.1 carats, sugarloaf cut, set in 22k gold milled in our studio from reclaimed and refined gold. The ring is high karat 22k throughout.



LOOK 4

Green Tourmaline Earrings

Light green tourmaline, 4.8 carats, with teal spinel, orange sapphire and white diamonds. Set in 22k gold, 18k gold ear wires and links, satin brushed.



LOOK 5

Coober Pedy Opal and Sapphire Earrings

Coober Pedy opals, 4.2 carats, with royal blue sapphires running alongside. Settings in 22k gold, ear wires and links in 18k gold, articulated drop.



LOOK 6

Tourmaline Ring

Tourmaline, 5.4 carats, teal with a green undertone. Set in 22k gold on an 18k gold band, satin brushed throughout. The color shifts as the light changes.



LOOK 7

Aqua Vibes Pendant

Rectangular sugarloaf aquamarine, 9 carats, set in 22k gold and surrounded by tsavorite garnets, on oxidized sterling silver with 22k gold plaques. On a 30 inch oxidized oval chain.



LOOK 8

Diamond and Sapphire Cuff Bracelet

Fused shapes of 22k gold and sterling silver, with padparadscha sapphires and antique diamonds in 22k gold settings. Hand stippled, matte finish.



LOOK 9

Purple Chalcedony Big Sur Classic Ring

Purple chalcedony, 7.6 carats, with depth and unwavering color, in a 22k gold setting on sterling silver. High polish, form fitted band.



Ali Lee

Karl Lee s son and apprentice, at his father s bench since the 1980s.

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LOOK 10

Colombian Emerald Ring

Colombian emerald oval cabochon, 8.25 carats, minor oil only, in 22k and 18k golds milled in our studio. Brushed finish.



LOOK 11

Australian Opal Ring

Coober Pedy opal, 10.8 carats, in 22k and 18k gold. Four small white diamonds, three across the top and one on the back, for whoever wears it.



LOOK 12

Fox Turquoise Grande Big Sur Classic Ring

Old stock, untreated Fox Mine turquoise from the Karl Lee gem collection, cut in 1998 on Partington Ridge in Big Sur. About 40 carats, in 22k gold on sterling silver.



LOOK 13

Pink Tourmaline Ring

Antique cushion cut pink tourmaline, 3.8 carats, in 22k and 18k golds alloyed and milled in our studio. Satin finish.



LOOK 14

No. 8 Turquoise Big Sur Classic Ring

Spiderweb turquoise from the Number 8 mine, 21 carats, cut asymmetrically, in a 22k gold bezel on a sterling silver band, finger fitted.



LOOK 15

Golden Beryl Grande Big Sur Classic Ring

Golden beryl, 21 carats, domed high in a 22k gold bezel on sterling silver, with a line of light that moves across it. Every Classic bezel is 22k gold, as it has been since the 1970s.



LOOK 16

Australian Opal Big Sur Classic Ring

Round Coober Pedy opal, 8.6 carats, in a 22k gold setting on sterling silver, form fitted band.



From the Studio

Work from the bench that carries no single name.

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LOOK 17

Blue Green Chromatic Tourmaline Ring

Green tourmaline, 8 carats, with a slight blue undertone, in a 22k gold bezel on an 18k gold base and shank. A small white diamond sits underneath, where only the wearer will know.



LOOK 18

Natural Golden Diamond Ring

Golden diamond, 1.3 carats, cut as a rare rectangular cabochon. Platinum bezel and top on an 18k gold band, high polish.



LOOK 19

Green Beryl Cushion Ring

Cushion cut green beryl, 13.2 carats, in 22k and 18k gold.



LOOK 20

Sapphires Orbit Shield Ring

Sixteen untreated sapphires with cognac and champagne diamonds and white diamonds, each set in platinum or 22k gold and fused onto a reticulated sterling silver saddle band. From the Torch Form series.



LOOK 21

Number 8 Turquoise Solitaire Ring

Number 8 mine turquoise, 5 carats, from the Karl Lee gem collection. Old stock from before the 1950s, sky blue with golden spiderweb matrix. 22k gold bezel on a platinum base and band, with two small white diamonds.

Credits

The work in this book is by Carrie Armstrong and Ali Lee,
at the bench of Karl Lee, who founded the studio in Big Sur in 1964.
Every piece is one of a kind.

CARRIE ARMSTRONG DESIGN · @CARRIEARMSTRONGDESIGN

ALI LEE · @BIGSURGOLDSMITHS

www.bigsurgoldsmiths.com · studio@bigsurgoldsmiths.com