

# COCKPIT ARTS 3 YEARS

**Jacqueline Cullen**  
- *Fine jeweller*



Jacqueline Cullen creates dramatic, jet black jewellery that shimmers with pavé set diamonds. She is one of the only jewellers in the world to use Whitby jet in fine jewellery, manipulating the natural beauty of this prehistoric stone in extraordinary ways to create a truly unique body of work. She regularly exhibits at major international shows including the British Fashion Council's Rock Vault, Couture Las Vegas, London and Paris Fashion Week and New York NOW. Her work is stocked in Dover Street Market stores in London, Tokyo and New York, as well as in high-end boutiques throughout North America and the rest of the world.

Jacqueline graduated from Central Saint Martins in 2003 with a double first in Jewellery Design. She first heard about Cockpit Arts thanks to a short business development course that they used to run and that was open to non-studio holders. Jacqueline signed up in the summer of 2006 - and quickly decided it was the perfect place to have a studio.

The fact that Jacqueline has upgraded her studio four times since arriving at Cockpit in 2006 neatly illustrates the growth of her business. She started out, as many newcomers to Cockpit do, in a shared space. At the time, Jacqueline was hand carving the Whitby jet on a lapidary machine in her studio. This was noisy, messy work and as the orders grew, it became clear that the impact on her fellow studio holders meant that she needed a sole-occupancy studio. For a while she occupied a studio in the East Wing without a sink, but as the lapidary machinery is water based, access to water was essential. She was moved to another sole-occupancy studio, this time with a sink, where she remained until January 2015. As the business expanded and she took on freelancers to help out, the space soon became crowded. "At times there were four of us, all trying to work in the same space together," she recalls.

By 2014, Jacqueline's work was becoming increasingly high profile. She had been selected by Stephen Webster's Rock Vault for a second year running, and had secured a series of high-end stockists both at home and abroad. "As I started to sell more work to bigger stores, I realised that I had to raise the standard of my work enormously," she explains. The large department stores were demanding a more standardised finish to her work, something that is harder to achieve when the pieces are individually hand carved.

Around the same time, Jacqueline returned from her first exhibition at Couture Las Vegas. The show had been a huge success and she was heading home with a large number of new orders. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, her production methods had to change at short notice. Faced with a large order and no one to help her make the pieces, she turned to Cockpit for support. Luckily David Crump, Head of Business Development, has a background in jewellery manufacturing and was the perfect person to have on hand in this particular crisis. With her jewellery orders increasing, and the need for a more standardised finish to the work, Jacqueline realised she had to start outsourcing some of her production processes. "I had to start designing and thinking in units that could be produced in small batches with multiple purposes," she explains. It was a huge shift in the way Jacqueline ran her business. "It's totally changed my way making jewellery," she says. A husband and wife team based in Whitby now carry out all the specialist lapidary work.



Early in 2015 Jacqueline moved into her fourth, and largest, studio to date. The studio is spacious and airy with lots of natural light coming from three big windows. The one slight downside is its location, tucked away behind the communal computer room on the first floor of the Holborn building. Jacqueline was worried that visitors to Open Studios would miss out on seeing her all together. "Cockpit Arts rose to the concerns I had. They created extra signage directing visitors to the studio, as well as prompting people on the door," she says. "In the end, the last Open Studios at Christmas was my best ever."

The larger space has enabled Jacqueline to zone her studio into specific work areas. There is now an admin desk, where her admin manager, fellow Cockpitter Sara Gunn, works one day a week. There is a large production area where her two freelancers set the diamonds, produce the gold elements and clean up and finish the pieces. "The four of us can now work side by side without impinging on each other," she says.

Best of all, Jacqueline now has a dedicated design area, complete with a large mood board where she pins ideas and images. Due to the room's layout, this mood board is constantly in her peripheral vision, something she believes has had a very real impact on her creativity. "Often you are attracted subconsciously to shapes, designs, ideas and images," she says. "It's only when you stand back from the mood board and view it as a whole that you start to see a pattern emerging."

Jacqueline's designs have changed dramatically in the last few years. Her recent collections feature geometric patterns that echo the Bauhaus principles, with elements that are easy to batch produce. But the development of her work has also been influenced by opportunity, most recently when she was invited to design a collection for the Chow Tai Fook/Hearts On Fire Diamonds Group. This meant translating her designs into 18ct red gold set with white diamonds. Up until this point, Jacqueline had only used precious metals for fittings and finishings in her designs. It also introduced colour to her work for the first time. "The project has given me the idea that only working in jet is going to limit my potential in sales," she says. "Do I turn my designs into metal versions in CAD/CAM? How do I make sure that my design identity is still there and I don't alienate customers who love and know me for the Whitby jet? Yet equally, how much can I grow as a fine jeweller if I only work in jet? This will be the next stage of development for the business."

[www.jacquelinecullen.com](http://www.jacquelinecullen.com)

Photos:  
Alun Callender and Lydia Whitmore

