



CHARMED, I'M SURE Elizabeth Jackson has fashioned unique necklaces by connecting together charm bracelets from her youth. The result is a fashionable time-capsule of her life.

Collecting Memories

IN SILVER AND GOLD // BY PAMELA HOVLAND

» I ACTUALLY heard the necklace before I laid eyes on it. I was shopping at a store that sells pre-owned furniture and eclectic treasures culled from estate sales when I noticed a fabulous necklace on the shop's owner, Elizabeth Jackson. While she wrapped up a customer's purchases, her necklace made the most joyful sound, like a hundred tiny sleigh bells. After I oohed and aahed, Jackson explains to me that during her childhood as an Army brat, her mother and she had collected multiple charms, documenting their extensive travels. As a result,

each of them amassed several bracelets full of decorative charms, mostly made of sterling silver.

An Egyptian pyramid. A Vietnamese fishing boat. A pineapple. A Spanish bull. A rocket ship.

"During the fifties and sixties," Jackson explains, "charm bracelets were very fashionable. Young girls wore silver and their mothers typically had gold. During our visits to unfamiliar places, my parents would give me a charm as a present—a souvenir I got to pick out myself. When my bracelet got too full or too

heavy, we started another one."

A Parisian pissoir and a fleur-de-lis. A Mexican flamenco guitarist. The symbol of Islam. A Girl Scout medal. The medal of St. Stephen.

One day Jackson decided to link together all the separate (and mismatched) bracelets using their existing fasteners, and *voilà*—she now had two strands of the most beautiful necklace. Her current improvised jewelry is similar to a scrapbook or memoir in that it is chock-full of personal stories and memories, all awash in a lovely patina from age. "This

is the finite collection from my growing-up years; a time capsule from ages 12 to 22," Jackson recalls fondly.

Clearly, this is a woman who loves objects layered with meaning, not only because of her creation of a totally original fashion accessory from them, but also because she has a business that celebrates the reuse of beautiful things deserving of another life chapter.

Jackson runs an estate liquidation business in Fairfield County, which means she helps homeowners purge a lifetime of possessions when the time comes to downsize.

“This business grew out of my love of things. For me, it is all about the stories attached to those things.”

“I am a voracious reader of biographies and memoirs,” she continues. “I guess I’m a voyeur at heart. People’s stories fascinate me. When I have a new client, I ask them a million questions in order to learn about their lives. If the homeowner is deceased, I head right to their bookshelves to get a sense of what interested them. When you come to my sales, you take a bit of that person’s history home with you. Someone else’s story then becomes part of your story.”

Jackson remembers the exact moment when her life of collecting began, as well as her first acquisition. “Toleware painting!” she exclaims without hesitation. “I’d just had my 13th birthday and was at a country auction in Maine with my mother and grandmother, both of whom never met an object they didn’t like. I was watching all these people enthusiastically buying, and I couldn’t wait to be part of it. I had some babysitting money, and when the auctioneer described the various compartments of a round spice box filled with tin containers charmingly painted, my hand went up. And boom! Five dollars and I was the owner.”

A lifetime of acquisitions began: items of

taxidermy, folk art, African-American dolls, and more toleware. “I don’t think of them as collections. I think of them as reflections of my interest in objects. I am an object girl and I come from a long line of object girls.”

An Austrian cuckoo clock. The Parthenon. A symbol of the Greek hunting Goddess Artemis. An old boot. A Scottish bagpipe player.

When her clients are considering buying a “new old thing” from one of her sales, Jackson tells them that the backstory is often as fascinating as the object itself. Jackson’s charm-laden necklaces are proof of that.

“The idea I’m always trying to impart,” Jackson says, “is that the most interesting homes are the ones that are populated by items acquired over time. I’ve been collecting since I was a little kid—probably trying to grab onto memories. But the notion of collecting to keep your mind alive, to research, to look, and to establish a personal signature... those are reasons to do it.”

The Berlin Wall. An abacus. A Jerusalem cross. A Maine lobster trap. A father’s engraved cufflink and a mother’s sorority pin both transformed into charms.

Sometimes, a collection even sounds good.