

SCHOOL FOR JEWELLERS

A thing of beauty gets you college diploma

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The school is nestled on the ninth floor of an industrial building among the fur factories of de Maisonneuve Blvd. W.

There's little cachet: linoleum corridors, fluorescent lighting, unadorned classrooms and no-nonsense ateliers.

But the stark setting belies what happens here: students at Montreal's École de Joaillerie learn to craft beautiful, original, glittering pieces of art that happen to be jewelry, too.

The best of those pieces are on display until Nov. 30 at L'Empreinte, 272 St. Paul St. E.

For instance: a necklace and ring by Pierre-Yves Paquette, made of rubber, steel and silver, with onyx and opaline stones, for his final school project. The necklace has a knife-like appendage.

"I like the industrial style," said Paquette, 23, pounding his fist on the table for emphasis. He works in silver but likes infusions of colour, reac-

tive metals, plastics, synthetics – "more modern material."

The school, which is linked to the CÉGEP du Vieux Montréal, has 12 professors, plus specialists in areas like beading, repair or stone-setting, as well as an independent gemology school on the premises. There are 58 students in the college course, plus adult students.

Claire Bourgault, 22, a graduating student, started out not having any idea what she was getting into.

"Ultimately, it became a passion. I tried it and loved it," said Bourgault, who won the school's first prize for her silver choker and bracelet set, adorned with steel cable, pearls, peridot and garnet.

She now works at Château d'Ivoire, polishing watches mainly, but next month will start crafting jewelry for the shop's clients.

Carole Plante, director of the school, says graduating students must do a project for the Salon des Arts et Métiers so that they learn the reality

of selling a piece of jewelry.

They are also encouraged to participate in international competitions. "You have to make your name known, otherwise it's very difficult."

Annik Lucier, a graduate of the school, managed to make her name very well known indeed, winning the De Beers International Award in 1996. It's the most prestigious jewelry award, comparable to an Oscar, said Lucier, a designer at Birk's.

Traditional is not my style, Lucier says on a tour of the store, pointing out a favourite piece, a \$3,300 pavé diamond and white-gold ring created for the millennium.

"I try to provoke, to be more modern, create new classics," she said. "That's my challenge here."

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MARCOS TOWNSEND, GAZETTE

Graduating student Claire Bourgault at work. Left, her prize-winning bracelet.

