Louisiana designer focuses on sculptural approach to jewelry

By KAREN MARTIN
Advocate staff writer

Like many women designers, Mignon Faget began making jewelry because she couldn't find the accessories she wanted in any stores. "Fortunately, everybody else wanted it, too," said Faget. Almost 25 years later, Faget is still turning out jewelry that first of all pleases her, but has also established a legion of loyal fans.

Based on Dublin Street in New Orleans, Faget creates as many as four collections a year. She has two Mignon Faget shops in the New Orleans area, one in Houston and sells in some department stores. Maison Blanche on Main Street recently began carrying her jewelry, and, again it's a case of a woman needing something she couldn't get elsewhere.

"I couldn't find her jewelry in Baton Rouge, and I was in a position to say I wanted it here," said Sherri Martin, manager of Maison Blanche's better jewelry department.

Faget, 60, designs classic jewelry. Pieces from her first collection, called "Sea," are still popular, and, in fact, have seen a resurgence as the environment has become more of a fashion focus.

"Back then, it was a 'back to nature,' 'flower children,' the 'good earth' sort of thing," said Faget. "Now, we know it's right scientifically, and it's hi-tech. There's a great interest in it. Perhaps not with as much heart, but more with our intelligence."

The clean, strong lines of the moonsnail in that collection have remained a constant in much of Faget's later work.

"I take a sculptural approach to jewelry," said Faget, who majored in sculpture at Newcomb College. "You can wear it, but it also looks pretty sitting on a table."

Other collections — she's done about 25 — have been built on the nature theme. There's "Zea," for which Faget used corn as a design source, and "Portafiori," in which she designed sterling silver bud vases to wear.

For "Knots," Faget translated the texture of wrapped fabric into metal, and she did the same with grosgrain in her "Ribbons" collection.

More recent collections have taken an architectural bend. For "Romanesque Return," Faget was inspired by elements from the New Orleans library, designed by 19th century architect Henry Hobson Richardson, which was being restored. "Schema" is a system of banding motifs that, when stacked, recreate the profile of a column top or base in rings and bracelets.

There also is a whimsical side to her work reflected in her "Running Rabbits" bracelet and other pieces with an "Animal Crackers" motif.

Faget's latest collection, "Crux," comes from a lifetime spent in New Orleans absorbing the spiritual side of the city.

"I've been doing crosses for several years. They're so much a part of my history as well as the environment of the city," said Faget. "It's a very powerful symbol."

She is at work on her next collection, and, while it will grow from the spiritual theme, Faget said it will take a different course from "Crux."

"It's not that I want to keep it a secret," she said. "It's just that if I talk about it, I won't do it."