



# San Francisco Arts & Crafts

Merchant Spotlight  
by Alison Schmidt

Although Kelly Ladas and Peter Wiley started their partnership in 1982, they both have separate, extensive prior histories that allowed their worlds to collide. Not only are they partners in business and life, but they are partners in art.

In 1974, Kelly left behind her banking job to sell puka shell necklaces at San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf. Although her new gig was supposed to be temporary, Kelly found herself falling in love with beads and jewelry. She soon discovered that other people shared this love, so she began to take her new career path seriously, and San Francisco Arts & Crafts was born. She says, "It was the only job I never intended to keep, and it was the one that stuck." She found a great source for Italian gold chain and charms, and since gold was big in the mid-1970s, Kelly started a line of jewelry using lots of it. The chain and charms were also hot sellers on their own, and she began to see her business take off—even enough to buy her first Mercedes-Benz. By the end of the 1970s, it was becoming quite clear that she had made the right career choice.

Peter's story also began in 1974. He had just graduated from the University of California at Santa Barbara with a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology, but could not find a job in his field. He decided to do some traveling, and found himself spending his days in Mexico, Central America, and South America. Upon his arrival back in the United States, Peter teamed up with a friend who had been selling handmade leather handbags as a street vendor in San Francisco. Peter started doing his own leatherwork, specializing in belts. He used the best materials he could find; the leather was tanned in France, and the metal leather stamps were made in Mexico from his exclusive designs. Once he got his product rolling, he obtained his own street artist seller's permit and went into business for himself. Being his own boss allowed

Peter to continue traveling the world, and in the late 1970s he went to several countries in the South Pacific, Australia, Europe, and then spent 18 months hitchhiking through Africa. When he returned home he and Kelly, who had known each other as fellow street artists, began their long-term relationship.

With a new relationship came a new business partnership. Kelly was making great money with her jewelry, and Peter found that women were a better target market than men, so he rowed his leatherwork out on the bay one night, sunk it, and joined Kelly in the jewelry world. As new partners, Kelly and Peter continued to sell their wares as street vendors, but in 1983 they began to look toward the future of their business. The two decided that they would expand San Francisco Arts & Crafts into the arena of tradeshows where there was more money flowing. Peter says, "It was becoming increasingly harder to market a product on the street. Even though the jewelry we were making was superior to what was being sold in high-end stores... and at half the cost, we had a hard time convincing the average customer." The couple also took on some sales reps that helped market their lines at gift shows across the country. Although the company did quite well, by the mid-1980s Kelly and Peter began to notice that their original designs were being copied as a result of catering to such a wide variety of patrons, which now included more artisans than ever before. Eventually, Kelly grew tired of giving away "free ideas," so San Francisco Arts & Crafts shifted its focus from selling finished products to selling beads.





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Today, San Francisco Arts & Crafts sells both contemporary and vintage glass beads. Kelly and Peter are proud to carry a wide variety of vintage glass beads from Czechoslovakia, Germany, and Japan. As the result of a trip to the Czech Republic in 1994, they are also direct importers of hand-selected Czech seed, pressed glass, fire polish, and lampworkbeads of all sizes, shapes, and colors. San Francisco Arts & Crafts was among the first bead companies to travel to the Czech Republic shortly after the revolution; therefore, they were responsible for introducing to the American public many Czech glass beads for the first time, including the reproduction of the "cathedral cut" bead that is based on an old Czechoslovakian style. Another of their exclusive offerings is the line of seed bead mixes that Kelly creates herself at the couple's home using her impeccable eye for color.

The couple travels to 19 bead shows per year, including several locations of The Whole Bead Show. They also have a website and a mail order business for retail and wholesale customers to keep them busy when they have a rare moment at home. They say, "We both have always had a love and devotion to making a good product; something that was made using the highest quality material available, and something that was made to last." Their mutual love for beads is what helps keep them together as a couple, and their individual talents regarding the bead business are what help keep them together as a company. Kelly is responsible for much of San Francisco Arts & Crafts' bead selection, and Peter manages the business end of things. They both work the shows, and have distinguished themselves as warm and hilarious bead merchants with whom customers and other vendors love to work.

Tucson 2007  
Whole Bead Show  
Suite 105



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