

FASHION Gabe Stewart turns her hand to jewellery crafting on a wee gem of a course that lets you take what you make

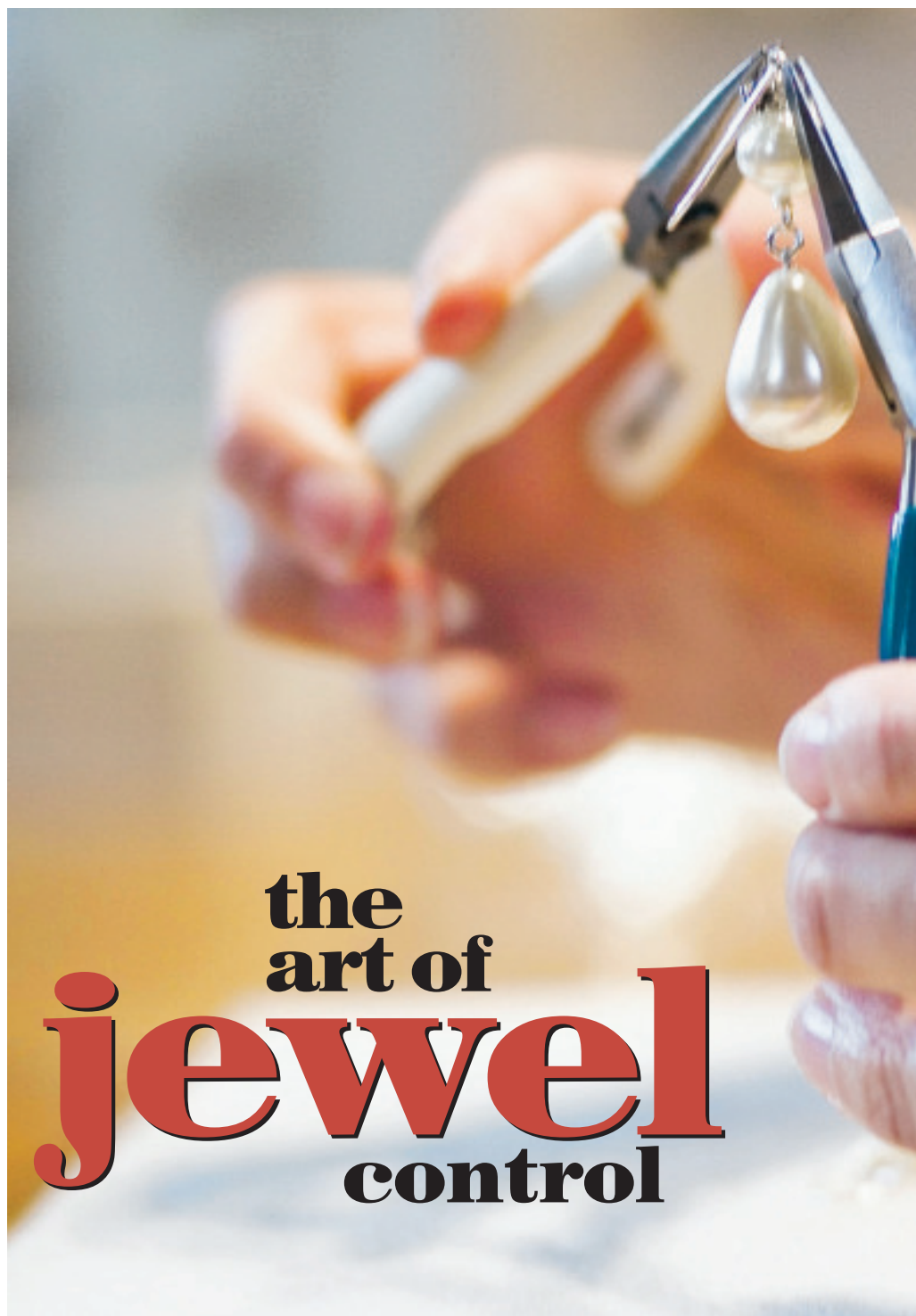
IMAGINE THE SCENE. Eight women, aged between 25 and 55, sit in complete silence at three tables arranged in a U shape, peering and poking at items in a worktray, lost in their own individual worlds.

Tongues peek out in unselfconscious self-absorption. A comforting concentration settles on them like a pashmina. The clock stops and time stands still as they continue to work away, hunched over their tools like a bunch of fairytale silversmiths. Which is pretty much what Amelie Alexander's jewellery-making workshops aim to produce: from the base metal of enthusiasm emerged a few sparkingly talented individuals whose work would have looked quite at home in many a fine jeweller's shop window.

Amelie Alexander's niche is bespoke jewellery, focusing on one-off pieces only. The website shows examples of the jeweller's work, but the idea is that a client who likes this style, but in a different colour, can have one made customised to suit their own particular preferences.

The jewellery workshop idea is simply an extension of this approach. The Perthshire-based Amelie Alexander hosts its jewellery school all over the country, and participants are well prepared beforehand with advice on how to choose the right style to complement a particular outfit or accessories, hair and skin tones.

Even before arrival a questionnaire gets your creative juices flowing: what are you are hoping to achieve from the course? How much jewellery-making experience do you have? Do you want to match jewellery colours/style with any particular item? (They can source materials to complement your item). This last question provoked me to bring a favourite pair of multi-coloured sandals, right, which had always been a bit pesky to accessorise, and I came away with the perfect set of jewellery to match.



the art of jewel control

"The event would be perfect for groups, especially for bridal or other parties celebrating something special"



For those struggling with themes or ideas, there are folders of current jewellery trends and styles to peruse at the workshop itself. Our instructor on the day is qualified silversmith Ian Broughton who has a very calming, easy-going influence in the room.

Each of our workstations is laid with a variety of pliers, cutters, safety glasses and snips. First off, we choose our trays, according to our colour preferences. These contain our selections of beads and chains and other items with which we will make our very own earrings, a necklace, a bracelet and a ring. You won't find any plastic here – all beads are freshwater pearls or semi-precious, and chains and attachments are made of sterling silver.



GLITTERING PRIZES
All the beads used at the workshop are freshwater pearls or semi-precious, and all the chains and attachments are made of sterling silver
Charlie Cooper



Then Ian starts to teach us the basics, how to create a small tidy loop, how to close chain links. There follows much angst and disbelief until all of us at various stages swiftly reach a Eureka moment, when we really have done it. All the procedures slip into place and from then on we are raring to go.

It becomes obvious that this is an ideal outlet for this group's bursting creativity. Although this is a day-long Sunday course, Amelie Alexander also runs weekday, weekend and evening classes.

Everyone on this particular course came on their own, and gelled quickly, but it's obvious that the event would be perfect for groups, especially for bridal or other special celebrations.

During the day I hear about groups

who have made special items with birthstone or other materials for landmark anniversaries. After we have mastered the basics, we watch, throughout the course of the day, four demonstrations on how to make earrings, a bracelet, a necklace and a ring, before going on to make the items ourselves.

A camaraderie soon develops, as each

■ Workshop costs start from £60 for a morning to £200 for a full day (including £100 of quality bespoke jewellery to take home). Pay for five in a party and get a sixth attending free. Edinburgh workshops take place on 3 and 4 April, with further dates to follow. For more information, telephone 01786-850 297 or log on to www.ameliealexander.co.uk

person's tastes become apparent, and as people borrow items from each other's trays to suit their own designs.

Over a delicious and healthy lunch, friendships develop further, but our group is keen to get back into the workshop and crack on with the afternoon's delights. Interspersed with cups of tea and coffee, and a most welcome glass or two of Champagne in the afternoon, the end result is relaxing and deeply satisfying.

I am left with fond memories, a strong desire to learn more and to repeat the experience and, of course, best of all, four unique, bespoke items of jewellery that shine with an inner luminescence whilst their maker sparkles with an almost insane glow of pride – "I did that!" 🌀