

What I've Learned Since I Got My GIA Diplomas

Fatma Oya Borahan, known as Oya to her friends and students, began her professional life as an artist who painted on silk, creating scenes from nature such as delicate flowers and birds, as well as portraits. Her interest soon extended to scarves, blouses and similar pieces of clothing, but it was her initial concentration on scarf accessories that led to her work with silver and gold jewelry.

"When I wanted to utilize gemstones, I realized I didn't know anything about them," Borahan says. "So I decided to learn gemology."

She enrolled in a Distance Education course with GIA in 1992, a decision she describes as "the best decision I could have made in relation to my educational life."

Borahan, who is a native of Turkey, describes the Distance Education courses as the most difficult form of learning for her. "I consider my biggest accomplishments the diplomas I received when I completed my correspondence courses," she says. "You must also take into account the fact that English is not my native tongue."

Borahan has also earned awards in jewelry design and continued her gemological education. Her designs were among the finalists in a design competition hosted in Turkey by De Beers in 1997 and 1998. She learned gemstone cutting and carving in Idar-Oberstein while studying for her second gemology diploma with the German Gemmological Association in 1998 because she didn't want to depend on the gemstones that are generally available on the market. She counts as "a great honor" her opportunity to learn gem carving from master carver Hans Ulrich Pauly.

Borahan also completed courses at the Gemmological Institute of Great Britain and received her Gem Diamond Diploma and her diploma in Gemmology there at the beginning of 2004. In addition to her design work, she ran an office in Istanbul, Turkey, between 1998 and 2002, where she did gem identification. Now semiretired, she has lived in Montreal, Quebec, for the last three years and joined the Montreal Gem & Mineral club, where she conducts various seminars for the members.

"I am famished for learning," Borahan says. "I guess I will always be a student."

Have a Mind That's at Peace. Borahan says your mind should be very peaceful to be able to create something. For example, she says, when she is in Turkey her workshop is just beside her bedroom. "I used to get up at night and think of something and needed to write it, or draw it right away. I think that is creation," she says.

Find a Source of Inspiration. While many of Borahan's designs are inspired by nature, she also takes a cue from old, detailed iron work. "In Turkey, when you work in the old places, you can see a lot of things

that inspire you," she says. Borahan also uses design books to spark her thought process.

Try Everything. If you don't succeed, don't throw things away. Keep trying, trying, trying, she says, pointing to a 750 ct gold nugget necklace she designed from a piece of gold she had left over. "I didn't know what to do. I just melted it and pushed the middle and it kind of came out by itself like that. There's a garnet set in it. I like it very much," Borahan says.

Don't Be Too Sure of Yourself. When you identify a stone, go over it many times until you are sure because it is very easy to be wrong, Borahan says. "You can make mistakes if you're not very careful."

Open Your Mind and Your Eyes. Many of Borahan's designs reflect the world around her. For instance, a beautiful piece of jasper reminded her of mountains and trees, so she used it to create a brooch depicting the scene using gold, ruby and emerald gemstones. The transfer of images is apparent in both her silk painting and her carvings. "That's how I started. I took a design from the silk scarf I made and made a brooch from it," says Borahan, recalling an iris brooch she carved from ametrine.

Knowledge is Key. Borahan says her experience in the industry has led her to believe that some jewelers lack sufficient knowledge to serve their customers with proficiency. A basic requirement for success in any business, including jewelry, is to know your merchandise, she says. Often customers are misinformed by some jewelers as a result of ignorance rather than deceit, she says.

You Must Be a Teacher. A sound knowledge of gemology is essential, but it is not enough, Borahan says. To serve a customer faithfully, a

jeweler must also teach them what a good gem is. For instance, she says, point out inclusions in gems, and help the customer see their beauty.

Borahan says her greatest success since earning her Graduate Gemologist diploma has been to instill a love for gemstones and their wonders in young people.

"I feel alive when I work with gemstones ... when I touch them," Borahan says. "I want the customers to feel as I do. I want to teach young people to be honest and true when identifying gemstones."

Build a Good Foundation. Borahan says the great sense of self-confidence she took away from her coursework with GIA has given her the platform to accomplish her goals. "My base in gemology was given to me by GIA," she says.

— Interview by Marga Kellogg



Fatma Oya Borahan, G.G., FGA, DGA
Independent gemologist

Age: 68

Home: Montreal, Canada

GIA diplomas and certifications include:

Graduate Gemologist diploma (G.G.), Jewelry Design certificate, Jewelry Display certificate, Insurance Replacement Appraising certificate, Counter Sketching certificate, Fine Jewelry Sales certificate

Favorite Quote:

"A room without books is a body without a soul."
— Cicero

To see Borahan's jewelry, go to
www.birdamlasu.com.

Image courtesy of Fatma Oya Borahan