



## IN FROM THE GOLD

An East German artist goldsmith is putting New Zealand on the map

**EIGHT YEARS** after the end of World War II in Europe, Germany was still occupied and segregated. Cooperation between the Allies and the Soviets had disintegrated and the country would remain divided for another 37 years. It was into this world that Christine Hafermalz was born.

Had her parents not foreseen the strengthening of the iron curtain and had the bravery to flee to the West, Hafermalz-Wheeler admits she could well have been a plumber like her father. It was 1957, she was four years old.

It was an emotional moment when she finally revisited Erfurt, her birthplace in the former GDR. When she travels now, it's not so much as a German, but as a Kiwi. "People say I'm no longer German anymore," says Hafermalz-Wheeler. Though she maintains the working practices and techniques learnt

and honed in Germany, the end product is surprisingly un-*teutonisch*.

Her handmade work is predominantly 18-carat gold, but she also works with sterling silver. Part of the uniqueness of her designs is the variety of gemstones used, from agate to amber, coral to jade, tourmaline to lapis lazuli. Her pieces sell for anything in excess of \$1,000.

There is a deconstruction to her designs, a fibrous rawness and a more organic, asymmetrical style. It's not what you would expect from a German designer. Much of that comes from her decision to settle in Aotearoa. "It's so easy to be inspired here in New Zealand. I often travel around, go back to my studio and create pieces from what I have seen."

New Zealand wasn't a planned emigration. She came here, liked it and never left.

That was 1992. Since then her work has been exhibited in Europe, China, the US, Bermuda, Australia, as well as here in New Zealand. A recent exhibition in China that featured some of her work saw over 100,000 visitors in just three months.

Beijing's Capital Museum held a retrospective on Sino-French painter Pan Yu-Lin. Hafermalz-Wheeler was challenged by Jeff Hsu, a Taiwanese art dealer and co-sponsor of the exhibition, to create a collection of 50 pieces inspired by the colours, textures, details and emotions from Pan's paintings.

This year she will exhibit in New York and closer to home — actually at home — on Waiheke Island, where she and husband David are currently building a studio/home.