



Local jewelry designer Nicole Potter finds inspiration for her handmade pieces both around the world and in her own backyard (©John Thompson)

where

Globally Inspired: Dallas' Nicole Potter of Betty James Jewelry

By [Jehan Lazar](#) on 10/05/16

I recently got the chance to sit down with Dallas native Nicole Potter, founder/designer of Betty James Jewelry. I wasn't expecting to dive into a world of culture, creativity, and passion and found myself fascinated by her unconventional jewelry artistic processes.

Traditional structures embrace natural beauty, but Potter is not afraid to stray from the norm. Eccentric pieces catch her eye and serve as a muse for organic and unique ready-to-wear art. It is in these instances when she continues to gather inspiration for her creations, stowing moments and impressions to implement in her collection.

Read more about Potter's handcrafted designs and the places she's traveled that have influenced her collections below—plus recommendations on where to stay both inspired and entertained in DFW.

Describe the aesthetic of the Betty James brand?

I would describe [Betty James](#) as an ethnic glam. I don't necessarily design for my personal aesthetic, but I involve my love of travel and culture into each piece. I try to incorporate a mixture of diverse materials into pieces with rich history and turn them into unique pieces. Even though my jewelry can be worn separately, it's when they are worn together that a beautiful and balanced composition emerges. It's about layering, adding on

continuing the journey and finding things that speak to you ... That's why I make all of my jewelry by hand I love the artistic journey of going from point A to point B. Creation and art are all about the process; it's when the magic happens.



Did you always want to go into jewelry design?

Not at all. I'm an artist, I've always painted and I always knew I wasn't going to go into the corporate world. In college, I got really exhausted with jewelry. I kept seeing everyone trying to fit into this mold, wearing the same stuff, having the same look. I always kind of hated that. The Betty James brand started with me trying to make jewelry for myself. I would hunt through thrift shops in search of vintage pieces, take them apart, and reconstruct them into something new. I probably brought about 50 pieces of jewelry to my first art show and that's when I began to take jewelry seriously because everything sold out.

Where do you find your inspiration?

I love archeology. The recordings of human activity through artifacts is something that inspires me. I am fascinated by anything primitive and ethnic. The Nasher Sculpture Center and Dallas Museum of Art consistently feed my creativity in Dallas. I do regularly make it to exhibits at the Kimbell Art Museum and Modern Art Museum in Fort Worth, though. Nevertheless, I do find a lot of my inspiration through traveling. I've got an eclectic collection of indigenous art and materials from my trips around the world and I love how each piece tells a story.



Your jewelry collections are named after different countries across the world. Which place had the greatest influence on your work, and why?

I felt inspired by Africa and that's how I started my Nigerian collection. I was buying a lot of African beads when I was there at that time. I use a lot of Ethiopian brass, Ghana glass, clay spindle beads, white bone shell, so it's tribally inspired, but accessible for every aesthetic. I was truly moved by the Maasai village I visited in Tanzania which inspired the (still) developing Betty James Foundation. Their handmade jewelry so intricate; I was lucky enough to bring a few pieces home with me. Africa really did light up my soul.

Do you have a favorite travel experience?

Israel was a life-changing trip. I think that was one of my favorite experiences and not only because of religious or spiritual reasons but because it's the heart of all civilization. It goes back to the A to B thing for me; it was a very primitive experience. The finished product is only as good as its story. There's something absolutely magical about Israel. I was so inspired by the art, history, culture that are the building blocks of all. I love the Middle East and have traveled all over getting inspiration for my Turkish and Persian collect

What cool treasures have you found?

I bought this nomadic Bedouin bracelet that's 300 years old from a museum collector in Israel. It's all hand cast silver that's so ornately done. I admire that level of craftsmanship and detail. Another cool thing was a camel blanket from Jordan that's essentially an oriental rug, but it's so much more. The styles and colors of each blanket serve as a form of identification from one tribe to another—it's an art form.

What's your favorite piece?

I like the [Draco](#) because it's simple and versatile. It's made of 100-year-old Nigerian brass disks and gold plated balls. You can dress it up or down—the coolest thing is the more you wear it, the brighter it gets!

What's your favorite collection?

My favorite collection is the [Luxe](#). It's the high end, more artistic collection where I make all of my pieces that might be a little “out there.” My designs aren't limited to a certain convention in this collection. My most popular pieces are the [Alexander](#) and the [Aiden](#). I've incorporated more cast metal designs into my new Greek Collection, which was revealed for the first time at The Armory during [New York Fashion Week](#).

Find Betty James Jewelry at [DFW retailers](#) including Nicole Kwon in West Village, Gemma Collection in Snider Plaza and Sussie's in Frisco.