



THE FABRICS OF A COMMUNITY

From one end of Main Street to the other, we talked with six Chatham designers who have made their mark in the community by doing what they love. From fish prints and fingerless gloves to resort wear and unique shark-themed T-shirts, these diverse designers share some common threads, so to speak: they each followed their dreams and they all share a deep sense of community and a connection with the ocean.

BY MARINA DAVALOS

Hooked on Fish Rubbings



"Every fish has a story," says artist Jenny Bovey of her fish rubbings. She knows personally the local fishermen who bring her specimens. Bovey paints the fish, presses them onto a surface and creates the rubbings. Then she'll dry the fish for future use in a mummification process that she and her husband, Andrew, learned to do by trial and error. "He was a biology major," laughs Bovey.

The art form is called gyotaku, practiced thousands of years ago in Japan. Gyo means fish, and taku means impression, and the technique was originally used on Japanese fishing boats. Fishermen would bring paper and ink out to sea with them to record the sizes and types of fish they caught.

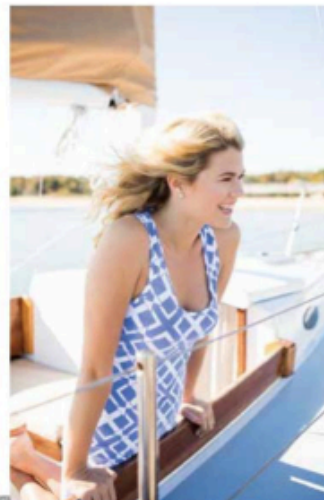
Bovey first encountered gyotaku while on a date with her future husband, Andrew, in 1987. They'd attended an art opening in Baltimore, Maryland, and Bovey was transfixed by a small image of a fish. "I couldn't tell what it was. A lithograph? A screenprint? I was captivated," she says. After much research, she learned it was gyotaku. She was hooked.

She and Andrew went to the local fish market, bought a fish, then bought white T-shirts and India ink. Says Bovey, "While I was painting the fish, I had a moment—this was so untapped and unexplored." They moved to Chatham in 1996 and opened Blue Water Fish Rubbings, where they sell high-quality T-shirts, dresses, hats, bags, mugs and wall hangings. Every sea creature imaginable is represented, and no two prints are alike, even if they come from the same fish—Bovey mummifies her specimens to be used over and over.



Born on the Beach

Hauling in a mahi-mahi is special, according to Mike Gorman, co-owner of MAHI Gold. "For a split second after it's caught, the mahi-mahi turns gold," he says. Gorman and his sister, Rebecca Voelkel, along with her husband, Brian Voelkel, are co-owners of the brand, which started in Chatham. It began in 2008, when the siblings created a MAHI Gold logo and made T-shirts and dresses to sell during the town's Fourth of July parade. They put on a trunk show—in their grandparents' shed. "Mike emptied out all the grills and lawnmowers and painted the inside white," laughs Rebecca. People showed up wanting the dresses featured in the parade. "Women were trying on dresses in our grandparents' bathroom. One lady got locked in when the door handle fell off"



They opened their store in 2014, featuring resort-wear dresses with stylized designs reminiscent of a Cape Cod summer. "Women fell in love with us for our classic novelty print dress," says Mike, referring to their original nautical flag print dress. "But we didn't just take a flag and put it on a dress," adds Rebecca. "It's a process of choosing a concept and stylizing it. The flag is designed and copied into a repeating pattern, giving the impression of flags." Another dress that features bright colors with lines crisscrossing in different directions is called "pixie sticks." "We take our ideas from the environment around us," she adds.

MAHI Gold

465 Main St., Chatham
508-348-5487

Owners: Mike Gorman and Rebecca Voelkel (brother and sister) and Brian Voelkel
mahigoldoutfitters.com

Honoring the Ocean

When it comes to living like a local, Taylor Brown is the real deal. A real-life fisherman's daughter, she began shellfishing at age 19 with her father, commercial fisherman Nick Brown. In fact, Taylor first designed a headband to keep her long hair out of her face while she shellfished. Shortly after, she came up with her well-known fingerless gloves, also designed with shellfishing in mind. She sold these designs in local stores, and before long, they were in high demand.

Brown holds a BFA in fashion design with a minor in textile design from Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston. Upon graduation, Brown applied for a grant to study and work in Vietnam under one of the top fashion designers in Ho Chi Minh City. Her experience in Vietnam, coupled with her fishing background and love of the ocean, influenced her decision to design all ecologically friendly clothing. "I grew up with the ocean," says Brown, "so I choose carefully—all the materials that I use are good for the environment, since everything always ends up back in the ocean." After nearly a year in Vietnam, she returned to Chatham and opened The Fisherman's Daughter Eco Boutique in 2009.

Her designs are all hand-cut and sewn locally from eco-friendly materials, such as organic hemp and cotton. "I'm a real rags-to-riches kind of person, a real Edward Gorey," Brown says of her designs, which often feature two or more different styles of fabrics sewn together. She has expanded to carry a children's line and clothing for men. Her store also features jewelry, candles and soaps made by other local artists.



Fisherman's Daughter

402 Main St., Chatham
508-292-5463

Taylor Brown, owner/designer

fishermansdaughtermarket.com



Rebecca Jean

649 Main St., Chatham
508-246-7054

Rebecca Shanahan,
owner/artist/designer

Classic Simplicity With a Flair

"Since high school, I always liked to draw pictures of outfits," says Rebecca Shanahan, owner of Rebecca Jean's Boutique, which opened in April 2016. The mother of two young boys, Seamus, 8, and Mason, 5, Shanahan studied painting and ceramics at Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island. Her store is a bit like a gallery, decorated with Shanahan's original Matisse-like paintings of flowers and women in dresses.

Her designs feature dresses of different styles and lengths, made from cotton fabrics with a variety of prints, including florals, solids and plaids. She started designing and sewing while she was in college. "I was lucky to live near a fabric store," says Shanahan. She says she likes to make simple designs, "anything that can be worn with flip-flops or with boots." Her first dress, which she calls the Rebecca, is a long spaghetti strap dress, and has been one of her best sellers. All of her styles are named after her family and friends.

Shanahan's first season was a successful one. "It was so gratifying to see people trying on my designs and trying to figure out which one to get!"

