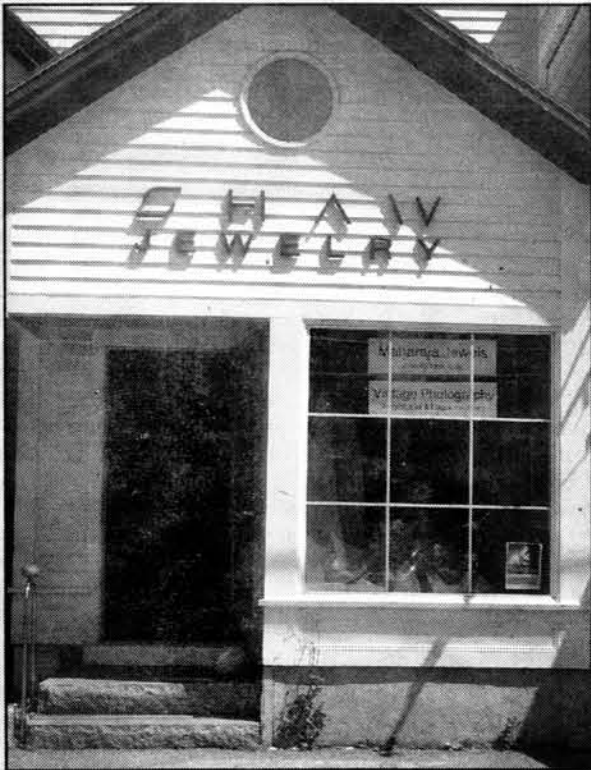
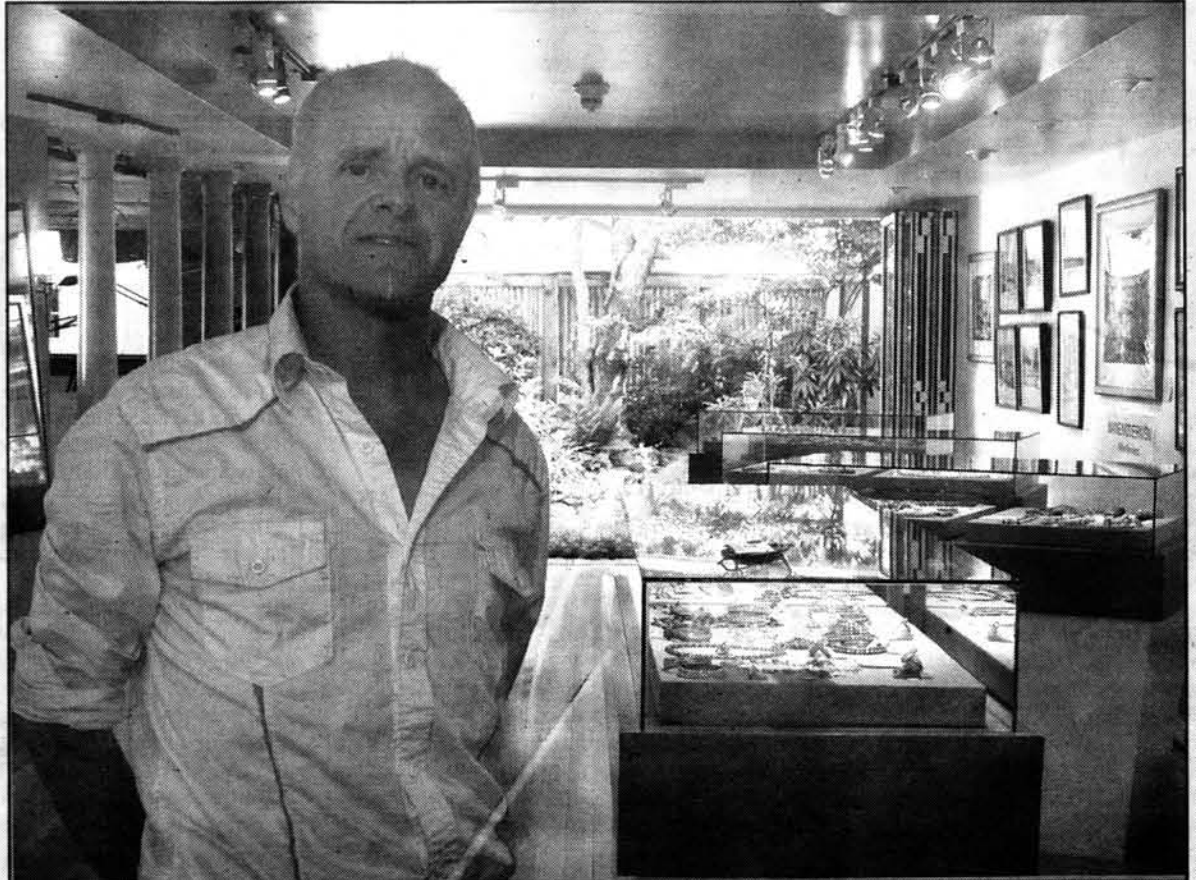


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Shaw Jewelry: A little shop of wonders



The shop on Main St. in Northeast Harbor has many surprises inside. PHOTO BY NAN LINCOLN



Like its owner Sam Shaw's shop extends far beyond "the box." PHOTO BY NAN LINCOLN

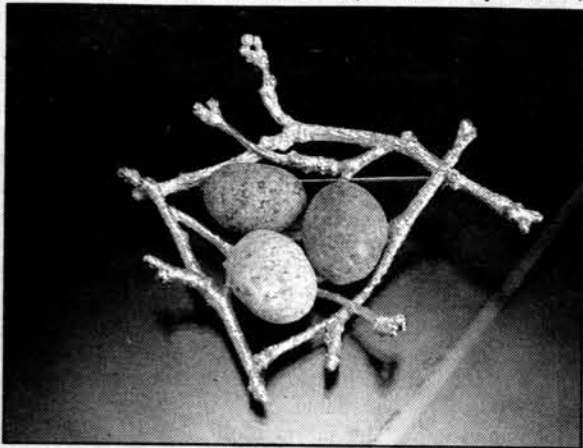
At first glance the friendly, little peaked roofed, white clapboard façade with its big front window under the words "SHAW JEWELRY" doesn't look all that different from all the other charming 19th century storefronts that line Main Street in Northeast Harbor.

The smooth round popplestone fastened to the end of the wrought iron rail at the entrance, is perhaps, the first clue that something altogether different and unexpected lies within.

For the past 26 years now, jewelry designer Sam Shaw's store and art gallery on Main Street has been a little shop of wonders for countless of folks who just happen to wander in, and then find themselves drawn to revisit again and again whenever a special occasions arises in their lives or just because they happen to be in the area.

Actually not so little. Like so much about Sam Shaw, including the man himself, what you get is so much more than you see.

Trim, puckishly attractive, always fashionably dressed,



Golden twigs and beach stones comprise this stunning brooch.

with a big smile and a bigger laugh, Shaw at age 50-plus is still packed with as much energy and as many ideas as he had when he first opened his shop when still a student at Rhode Island School of Design in 1983.

A lifelong summer resident of MDI, Shaw was among the early wave of young men and women who, drawn to the beauty of the place, decided to try to make a living and a life here year-round.

Unlike many of those dreamers, he not only succeeded in living and raising his two daughters in Southwest Harbor - he has become something of an icon of elegance and innovative good taste for a generation of jewelry buyers and art lovers that extends far beyond perimeter of Mount Desert Island.

OK, let's go in, now.

The first surprise upon entering Shaw Jewelry is how big it seems. Belying the cozy cottage look of its exterior, the interior, is all understated elegance with its soft track lighting beaming down on case after case of glass-topped jewelry displays. On a bright, summer day like today there's another sort of light that infuses the shop, illuminating the precious ores and gemstones that lie in those cases. It's daylight, a northeasterly light that floods into the main room through an invisible fourth wall. Well, actually a missing fourth wall. At the back of the shop Shaw has indeed removed or retracted the entire wall, and on a good day one can just walk straight through the shop into a lush jungle sort of garden that seems on the verge of creeping inside - one can imagine vines twining around the legs of the display cases, myrtle and blue bells replacing the carpet.

This hasn't happened yet, but nature has taken over elsewhere. Inside those cases one finds golden twigs fashioned into bracelets, necklaces, brooches and earrings with glittering diamonds scattered about like dewdrops, or surrounding a nest

of polished beach stones or a single exotic gem, or luminous pearl. Other beach stones are wrapped in gold and strung into striking necklaces and bracelets or fashioned into pendants, or rings that see nothing wrong with pairing a simple lucky stone plucked from a local beach with diamonds, sapphires, opals or rubies.

Nature, it seems is everywhere here, inside and out and here, it is all precious.

"My intent is to redefine what is beautiful," says Shaw. "I take things of no intrinsic value - a twig, a pebble, maybe - and by setting them in gold I put them on an altar of respect. It's a political statement as well as design choice, it expresses my feeling about what is valuable."

Although many other jewelers now use beach pebbles in their jewelry, Shaw was among the first to see that even the plain black, gray and white stones polished by the sea were worthy of gold

settings and every bit of his artistic attention to design detail and placement.

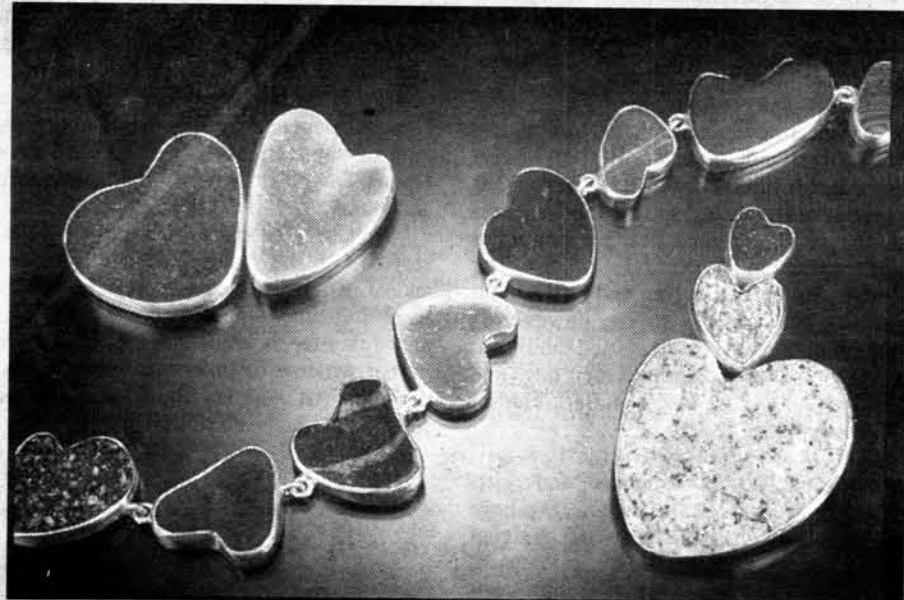
"In essence I've taken something worthless, made it into something useless, a mere adornment, and in the process it transformed it into something, well, precious."

In the case of those twigs, that description is literal. He actually gathers real twigs from the forest floor, casts them in plaster, heats the plaster to 2,000 degrees, which vaporizes the wood, then fills the cavity with molten gold, creating a solid gold twig.

But the twigs and the beach stones are just two of Shaw's signature lines of jewelry. He is also well known for his ornamented discs of pale beaten 22 karat gold, which manage to look very ancient (an Egyptian pharaoh and his wife would look right at home in them) and at the same time very contemporary,

• SHAW Page 35

By Nan Lincoln



Sam Shaw was one of the first jewelers to pay serious attention to common beach stones.



Sam Shaw's shop is both elegant and inviting.