

of the magical Midwest. The following are profiles of some of these talented designers. We met with them to find out what makes them tick.

## DESIGNERS: MIDWEST STYLE

By Caryl Gout *Contributor*

**CHICAGO** The Midwest is teeming with world-class independent jewelry designers who draw their inspiration from their surroundings. Many find the Midwest to be a place that allows them the

freedom to breathe and create in peace, without feeling like an included diamond under a critical microscope. NATIONAL JEWELER brought together a small sampling of the talent that teems among the skyscrapers and beside the cornfields



Photo Courtesy: Irene Kijak

LEFT to RIGHT: Ellie Thompson of Ellie Thompson Co. in Chicago; Burdett Milkins of Milkins Jewelers in Monroe, Mich.; Michelle Dene Reagan of Dene Design Studio in Chicago; Mariusz Zaleski of Mariusz Zaleski Ltd. in Chicago; Christine and John Strobel of John/Christine Designs in Madison, Wis.; Karin Jacobson of Karin Jacobson Co. in Minneapolis; George Sawyer of George Sawyer Co. in Minneapolis; David Liska of David Liska Designs in Milwaukee; and Tammy Kohl of Takohl Design Ltd. in Chicago.

### KARIN JACOBSON

A relative newcomer on the jewelry scene, Jacobson works in big, bold, sci-fi-inspired jewelry often using silver and cubic zirconia to keep the jewelry affordable. Her obvious love of Japanese animation and comic book heroes sets her jewelry apart. The result is unique, "beam-me-up-Scotty," futuristic fantasy.

**Location:** Minneapolis

**Honors:** AJDC New Talent competition 2002

**Hobbies outside of jewelry:** Thai-style kickboxing, rollerskating, ice fishing.

**First piece of jewelry made:** A ring cast from a fake gold alloy (which turned my finger green) inlaid with an enamel star (which promptly fell out in pieces).



Karin Jacobson's trendsetting, bold jewelry is inspired by Japanese animation and comic book characters.

**Worst jewelry moment:** Watching molten gold roll off my soldering block onto the wooden floor, where it started about 50 tiny fires.

**If I hadn't become a jewelry designer:** It would have been fun to design cars. The shape of cars is so interesting and aerodynamic. I love the mixture of science, engineering and art.

**Inspirations:** Comic books, Japanese animation, robots and mechanical parts.

**Most impressive piece of jewelry ever seen:** A forged gold Egyptian breastplate. It was shaped like a bird with incredible detail, and it was about 9,000 years old.

**Why the Midwest?** I'm influenced by the clean lines of Scandinavian design popular in the Midwest. People don't realize there is a strong culture of the arts in the Midwest. There is more freedom to be daring here, where New York is a little more judgmental. There is a lot of exposure and a lot of space and freedom to do interesting stuff.