

Our Next Bead Stop

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The first time Sara Mancini made a pair of earrings at summer camp, she was hooked. Although she describes the earrings as the ugliest things she’s ever made, she loved the feeling of making something herself, and it was enough to keep her coming back for more. As she grew older, she continued to make jewelry and visit bead stores everywhere she went, daydreaming about one day opening a shop of her own. After working at a bead store in New Zealand for several years, Sara knew she’d found her calling and got serious about realizing her dream. She spent the better part of the next year working on a business plan, found a great location in Oakland, California, and took the plunge. Blue Door Beads opened its doors on June 2, 2012.

Sara’s friends and family chipped in to help build the shop using reclaimed and recycled materials for a natural, rustic feel that inspires creativity. Old printer trays hold beads, and a handmade display case is lined with hundred-year-old redwood from the side of an old house scheduled to be torn down. Lime-green chairs encircle a worktable made from old teak from Southeast Asia. A soft, comfy chair at the front of the store sits next to a table with thirty-plus books for customers to look at for inspiration. The shop also features exposed steel beams, a dark concrete floor, and a wall of doors and windows at the back of the shop dividing the space.

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Blue Door Beads offers a wide variety of beads. The local clientele includes people of different cultures, age ranges, and socioeconomic statuses, so Sara stocks the shop with a thoughtful mix of current trends, customer requests, and items that she loves. Some of the more unique items for sale in the shop include found objects, such as vintage fishing lures, radio resistors, and paint chip samples. The shop caters to beginners as well as more experienced beaders, providing space for customers to sit and use the shop’s tools free of charge. Help and advice from the staff is always available for those who want to make jewelry on the spot.

Blue Door is much more than just a bead store. They offer classes, repair services, design consultations, and custom designs. They rent out space for private parties and events, and even feature four open artist studios located in the back of the shop, currently utilized by two jewelry designers, an upholsterer/seamstress, and a painter. Blue Door is also active in the local arts community, displaying work by different local artists each month and participating in the “Piedmont Avenue Stroll” on the third Thursday evening of each month along with approximately thirty other businesses.

One of Blue Door’s most popular events is “Wine and Pizza Topped with Beads,” held on the last Friday of every month. Beaders can show up empty-handed and purchase supplies from the shop for 10% off, or bring their own projects from home. Both wine and pizza come from local businesses, and prizes are raffled off during the evening. But if you want to join the fun, be warned—this event fills up quickly and is limited to twelve people!

When asked what her customers like best about the store, Sara responds, “The great service, helpful staff, creative environment, and that we know them by name. Even if you are new to beading, you can make something with our help! We tell people that even if they pick out just one bead, we will empower them to make something!”

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