

# The District Factory

ALLISON DIAZ / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

## Jewelry by designer Susie Rekechensky of Phairytale Jewelry.

Wedged between art galleries and furniture boutiques in the Design District sits a nondescript white warehouse that comes alive one Saturday a month with local artists, jewelry designers and fashion mavens.

Dubbed The District Factory, the maze-like space pops up during the Design District and Wynwood Second Saturdays Art Walks, when between 30 and 40 local designers set up booths to sell their handiwork. A DJ spins club-style beats as a film projection of a local artist's work plays on the wall behind him. Meanwhile, a pop-up restaurant Phuc Yea! (pronounced fook-yay) serves up Vietnamese finger foods like gỏi cuốn, or summer rolls, rounding out the Saturday night vibe.

At the core of The District Factory's mission is curating fashion-forward designs that "you can't get down the street at another boutique," said Grace Castro, who created the monthly event in April with fellow designer Chelsea Conklin.

"Art Walk is all about art, but who doesn't love shopping?" Castro said. "And when you can't afford a \$5,000 piece of art, you can walk away with a cool ring that's original and unique."

Castro and Conklin were first introduced by The District Factory's property owners, who recognized the two shared a vision. Castro and Conklin each produced market-style events at the Palm Lot — the building in which The District Factory is held — where local artists and designers could sell their products. Castro ran Arboleda, a vintage and handmade crafts festival, and Conklin created Launch Arte Market, where local artists, designers and entrepreneurs could sell their goods. The two now run their own separate joint venture businesses, UP HEIGHTS and PLAT4M respectively, specializing in creating outlets for emerging artists and entrepreneurs.

The participating vendors at The District Factory enjoy meeting new customers, as well as interacting with fellow designers and artists.

“It’s not that competition feel — I like that togetherness feel,” said Aria Nero-Seder, a jewelry designer. “The District Factory is trying to build a more creative Miami.”

Here are a few of the participants:

## Aria Neror

Everyone at The District Factory has a story.

For Nero-Seder, 38, of Miami Shores, her namesake jewelry collection Aria Nero was a result of recognizing her creative abilities after being involved in the retail industry for more than 10 years. Nero-Seder left her management position at the Barney’s CO-OP in Miami Beach about six years ago to become a “mompreneur” and give birth to her daughter. Now, she designs full-time and does freelance retail work, like helping the shops at the Biltmore Hotel with merchandising. Nero-Seder said her pieces “stand out.” Her necklaces and bracelets create a nostalgic feel with vintage chains, old brooches and other materials she finds at garage sales and thrift and vintage stores.

Nero-Seder’s collection of pieces ranging from \$30 to \$500 is featured at the Biltmore, local boutiques and the Miami Art Museum, where most of the higher-end pieces are for sale. “I’m a designer, I’m the assembly line, I make everything, I design everything,” she said. “You have pieces that are handcrafted and unfortunately you can’t compete and sell them for \$20.”

Nero-Seder’s newest design venture is in collaboration with her sister, Deirdre Nero, a local lawyer who has Alopecia Areata, a disease resulting in hair loss. The sisters’ “B.A.L.D.” line, which stands for “Bad Ass Lawyer and Designer,” will showcase earrings with a more mainstream flair aimed at making the statement that “You’re beautiful with or without hair,” Nero-Seder said.

The first pieces of the B.A.L.D. collection will be featured during The District Factory’s August events. Fifteen percent of B.A.L.D. sales will be donated to Alopecia Areata-related charities, including The National Alopecia Areata Foundation and The Global Alopecia Mission.

For more information about the Aria Nero and B.A.L.D. collections, visit [arianero.com](http://arianero.com).

## Phairytale

Similar to Nero, Susie Rekechensky of Phairytale Jewelry, 38, brings together thrift and vintage materials to “give a heartbeat back to things that have been dormant for a while,” Rekechensky said.

Rekechensky revives these pieces not only by reusing discarded jewelry, broken chains and old coins for her collection of necklaces, earrings, rings and bracelets, but also by embedding something special within most items: a chunk of a healing stone.

A couple of years ago, Rekechensky began going to an acupuncturist, who gave her a quartz crystal to carry around in her bag.

“I don’t know if it was just a mental thing, but I started to ease off the stress,” Rekechensky said.

Now, most of her pieces are home to a piece of fluorite, rose quartz or tiger’s eye.

“It creates a special connection with the piece,” Rekechensky said. “Your jewelry is really the heartbeat of your wardrobe, and I really like to give that rhythm to every piece of Phairytale Jewelry.”

Rekechensky was introduced to vintage as a little girl by her mother’s best friend, who worked with antiques. Rekechensky frequented estate sales, and her mom’s friend passed along hand-me-downs, once leaving 6-year-old Rekechensky with a pair of high-heeled cowboy boots.

“That’s where the love and care for the vintage stuff came from,” she said.

Then, about four year ago, Rekechensky became inspired by little shops in New Orleans while on vacation there. After 15 years as a graphic designer, she started her own jewelry company and has continued doing print and web design for a marketing agency four times a week. She also designs the promotional pieces for Phairytale.

Rekechensky sells her pieces online and at The District Factory, and also creates custom pieces for her clientele, who often bring her beloved family heirlooms to incorporate into a new piece.

For more information about Phairytale Jewelry, visit [phairytalejewelry.com](http://phairytalejewelry.com).

## Lisu Vega

A common thread among the designs featured at The District Factory is that many have been recycled from mainstream, old or wasted materials to create one-of-a-kind products.

Eco-friendly designer Lisu Vega, 32, uses this technique by creating her own fabrics of silk, charmeuse, chiffon and cotton.

“Everything is unique,” said Vega, who lives in Midtown and moved to Miami-Dade County nine years ago from Venezuela. “Every piece is a baby for me.”

Vega designs a line of women’s clothing fashioned with trendy designs, like tribal prints. Then, she creates colorful and textured accessories pieced together with scraps of her used fabrics and stones.

“We try to keep art style in all the designs,” Vega said.

Vega has been experimenting with different materials for about 14 years. Her work has been featured in numerous exhibits around the world, and her fashion designs have been showcased at Miami’s Eco-Art Fashion Week and Miami Beach International Fashion Week.

Her most recent project is Trip Hope, a T-shirt collection for newborns up to children age 10, which she designs with her husband Juan Henriquez. Their inspiration was their 4-year-old son.

“We tried to put all concepts in one name: hope; explorer; imagination,” Vega said. “The kids love it because they feel identified.”

For Vega, The District Factory offers a supportive network of designers and new contacts.

“Usually when you’re a new designer in the market it’s really hard because everything costs so much money,” she said. “For me, those people are like my family.”

For more information about Lisu Vega’s collections, visit [lisuvega.com](http://lisuvega.com).

## Juan Henriquez

Vega’s husband Henriquez, 31, credits The District Factory for being the “first step for artists to be recognized” in the Miami area.

“I think the great thing about this event is that local artists have the chance to be seen, to show their work,” said Henriquez, who arrived in Miami from Venezuela six years ago. “That’s one of the most important things happening in Miami, which is a city that is step by step opening its doors to artwork.”

Henriquez, who has been involved in art for more than 15 years, is an abstract artist who will be featured Saturday at The District Factory. His work has been displayed in various museums and events around the world, including last year’s Miami Beach Art Basel.

On Saturday, he will exhibit between five and eight of his paintings, which will be up for sale. The pieces range between \$500 and \$4,000.

Henriquez often works with acrylic paint and crayon on wood or canvas. Lately, he has been dabbling in digital art printed on metal or plastic, as well as etching. He said that his artwork features unrecognizable figures of people, objects and animals.

“I would not define each drawing in a specific language because I don’t want to get defined that way,” he said. “It’s just expression. It’s just art.”

For more information about Juan Henriquez and his artwork, visit [juanhenriquez.com](http://juanhenriquez.com).