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Looking back on 2020 - a very unusual year!

And we look forward to 2020, in the hope that it is bigger and better, and we are braver and stronger than before!

Hi All,

As 2020 draws to a close, I don't think I'd be speaking out of turn if I say "I'm glad that's over"!

We've lost loved ones, had families torn apart and businesses decimated. Our social fabric has been ripped and tattered, and our wonderful open friendliness - for which our country is famed - has been sorely tested. And yet, here we are... just about COVID free, and dare I say - still with a sense of humour!

The ways of working for many of us have changed, and may never go back to normal. For me personally, I have worked from my home study for nearly 10 months, and my current employer foresees that situation to continue through 2021. I work at the Australian National University, and the ANU has risen to the challenge of delivering education online. Non-essential office-workers will continue to work from home, and I believe this is a trend that will continue for some time. Tele-working has finally become a reality - courtesy of COVID. Of course, this comes at a cost. The ANU has to lose a huge amount off its bottom line, this year, and next. So my job is not assured past the end of this month! Fingers crossed it all works out!

Our physical isolation as a nation has been a blessing in one way. But for businesses (fledging and established) it has been a bit of a two-edged sword. Product shipping has been slower, and more expensive to get.

2020 - A Retrospective

I started Merlin Mosaica in February of this year. My aim was to import some more unusual product, and in that, I think I have succeeded. I am always on the look-out for unusual product, and practical implements and tools to help us all in our creative endeavours. The business has grown more quickly than I could have anticipated. I have shipped almost 300 orders, and stock nearly 700 different products! Merlin Mosaica has 900 followers in Facebook, and our wonderful Merlin Lounge has 450 members. Not too bad for a part-time business - (huh) in it's 10th month, being run out of a spare room study, by one person!

At this juncture I have to acknowledge the massive debt of gratitude owed to Leanne Williams. Leanne first purchased product from me back in June, and came along to a paver workshop I ran. From then she has become my biggest supporter, a friend, and a most wonderful helper. Leanne is the lovely person who packs stock into the bags that eventually make their way to you. We have many delightful chats over a coffee or two, and she often

"If everyone would look for that uniqueness, then we would have a very colourful world."

~Michael Schenker.





says that the products are so much nicer in the flesh (so to speak) than they are in photographs. She's right about that too. Actually, Leanne is right about a lot of things!

I must also acknowledge some of the other lovely people I have met along the way. Peter Twining is the most delightful character with whom I have had many an amusing chat, and whose opinion I value. I am building wonderful relationships with many of my suppliers: Carrie from No Days Adhesives; my new glass supplier; and my first supplier of glass tile in the states... all these people I hold dear to my heart. I have engaged in many wonderful conversations with my clients, who I also value. There is nothing like shared interests to build a connection, and I do love a chat!

I have refined the business model. I am specialising in selling glass - in all its guises: glass tile; dichroic glass bits; Italian millefiori (melted, sliced and square); crash glass; mirrors; sea-glass; glass shields; and glass gems and nuggets. In the tile range, I have found some wonderfully unusual pieces: iridised glass with an almost matte/frosted finish; a wonderful mirror-finished iridised tile; some with wonderful textures. I stock all shapes: rounds, squares, triangles, rectangles, diamonds, hexagons, rhomboid and irregular. I have matte, iridised & pearl, gloss, textured and smooth. And the colours: icy whites through to deepest blacks, and every hue in-between. Sizes range from 4.8mm up to 25 mm square.

Another area I am continuing to develop is the natural product range:

- "**From the Land**" (Animal, insect, and floral products);
- "**From the Earth**" (Natural Ores, stones and agates) and
- "**From the Sea**" (shells and shell tiles; sea-urchin spines).

I also have the "**Merlin Miniature's**". Lovely little tea-set items, mini-statuettes & flower boxes (for example). Whilst this range has always been there, I haven't promoted it as much as I should have... not enough time! Focus to date has been on the glass and natural ranges. Likewise with "**Ali's Treasures**"... pre-loved jewellery that would be wonderful for certain styles.

And let's not forget my range of tools. As with other products, I am continually on the look-out for different items - ones that are practical. These are typically tools that I use myself, that aren't necessarily that easy for others to find.

There is also my range of adhesives. I am the original Australian distributor of the "**No Days**" range of heat-activated adhesives. I came across this product personally, and bought some for my own use. When Merlin Mosaica came into being, I contacted the business owner and set up a distributorship. It was my intention to wholesale this on, but unfortunately other suppliers realised how good it was, and jumped onto the band-wagon, leaving me no margin with which to do so. I also sell **Prep Multi-Use adhesive**, as I prefer to have adhesives that are all-weather, and Prep is not available at Bunnings, where many of us shop. It has the added advantage of being an Australian Product.

To underpin the more unusual stock items, I also sell a range of more common items. These are stocked elsewhere, but my aim is to keep prices competitive. These are more high-turnover products and help support the higher cost of importing some of the rarer products.

It is not my practice to run sales, and hopefully it will not be. They are reasonably time-consuming to set up (and I have precious little of that). Avoiding sales also means that I can keep my base prices lower. I do strive to keep prices low, but I do have to make a profit also... and that is sometimes a fine tightrope to walk. I aim to couple low prices with superior service, and am always contactable by phone (or will phone back if unavailable), to discuss and workshop any issues you may have regarding a technical problem, navigating the web-site or anything else you care to raise. If I can help, I will. I am also more than happy to search out special products you may require (if I can).

2021 - A Lens to the Future

I plan to have a break over January (from my day-time job). This should give me some time to actually make some mosaics, and set-up some stuff for the coming year.

As many of you are aware, I have a largish shipment of **stained glass** in my garage. I will be cutting that into saleable size, packing, labelling and posting onto the web-site. I have almost 80 colours to load. Rest assured there are plenty more to come.

I am currently discussing the importation of a labour saving device for **cutting of glass sheets**, circles and strips. These will be especially good for those of us who are losing hand strength or control. I hope to have a trial unit within the next few weeks.

I also want to set to and design some **shapes** to have cut from glass. These will be cut using a water-jet cutter (like a laser for glass) and will be an exclusive line for Merlin Mosaica alone. I have ideas bubbling away - they just need refinement and execution!

Likewise I want to work on designing some **exclusive substrates** - in both .mdf and clear acrylic.

I have been working with a **fused glass** artist - I already have some wonderful handmade dots, and eyes. We are also collaborating on some spectacular pebbles for you... These will be awesome, and lovingly hand-made in Australia

I do have a selection of **Cinca** (unglazed porcelain) and **Natural stones** to price, package and market.

I am looking to extend my range of **grout colourants**, and am waiting on some different shipping options, so that I can supply it in smaller quantities for you. 100 grams is a lot of colourant, considering you use less than 10%.

I do have some **jewellery bezels and findings**. Hopefully I will be able to get them up in January.

I will also be doing so work on the **web-site**, and refining my cost model.



So 2021 will be a busy year for me!!

I am also preparing for **celebration events** throughout the year - I will be designing products for Valentines Day, Easter, Mother's and Father's Day.

I am also hoping to get set up so that I can create videos, but I really need to clear the decks first.

Christmas is Coming:

Yes, Christmas is almost here! Have you checked out our Christmas substrates in acrylic, and our lovely Christmas Stained Glass shapes? The acrylic shapes make great Christmas ornaments, especially when decorated with our new transparent range of 10mm tiles. Our Stained glass shapes are wonderful for inclusion in Christmas themed artworks.

Also our range of fused glass Christmas trees and pendants - perfect for Secret Santa's, Teacher gifts or stocking stuffers. Our fused glass products are all handmade in Australia.

Also, did you know that you can now set-up multiple Wish-lists (one for each project), AND you can download them? Leave them scattered about for that other person to find - a not too subtle hint!!

New In Store:

This month I brought to you:

- A stunning new shipment of **African Sand-Cast** tribal beads.... Absolutely stunning little lumps of goodness, and more on the way
- Wonderfully versatile **Diamond glass tiles**, in a stunning colour range
- Clever little **Diamond Hand Pads** - great for sanding off sharp edges, and avoiding the use of a grinder. These have been very popular, and I have already ordered a re-stock shipment.

Please do let me know what you think of the products, and of the business. I would also really appreciate a recommendation on one of the wider-audience sites.... Word of mouth is the BEST advertising of all!

In the Pipeline:

Apart from the plans for 2021 mentioned above, I do have product sitting here that just hasn't made it onto the web-site for various reasons:

- More coloured crystals - a variety of colours;
- Bugle beads - gold, silver and more;
- Seed Beads - many exciting colours;
- Ball chain - Different colours and weights.

... and lots more

Till next year..

stay safe,

Ali

