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# Shady Lady

■ JIL SMITH'S LIGHT TOUCH

By Mia Nicholson

COMBINE RICE PAPER, a metal frame and an exquisite eye for color, and what do you get? Part lampshade, part work of art—courtesy of designer Jil Smith.

Smith's one-woman business, Insatiable Studios, occupies a subterranean nook in Pioneer Square's Elliott Bay Antiques, where a cluster of floor lamps topped with her one-of-a-kind shades beckon like oversize Technicolor poppies.

"I have a lampshade right now that looks like red Jell-O," says Smith, with obvious, almost giddy affection. "It just sets my heart ablaze."

Indeed. Smith's exuberantly hued shades seem the perfect antidote to leaden Seattle skies: cheaper than a Caribbean vacation and more fun than Prozac. Illuminated bands of red and saffron evoke a bevy of Tibetan monks. Blue and green stripes convey the Côte d'Azur. Even the undyed paper shades emit a golden, welcoming glow.

Smith, 31, found her current métier after working in a variety of media. A graduate of Brooklyn's Pratt Institute, she launched her art career at Marvel Comics, and later worked as a textile designer, children's art teacher and commercial scenic designer.

She eventually found that she couldn't tolerate the toxins used in commercial art, nor did she savor the pace. And more esoteric endeavors—like a foray into designing handmade buttons—didn't pay the bills.

"I've always been looking around for



Jil Smith layers rice paper over an armature to produce her fanciful lampshades.

a sustainable, reasonable way to earn a living," explains Smith, whose business is three years old. "This happens exactly at my speed: It's slow, thoughtful and loving. I don't do anything fast."

Smith's process involves tearing imported rice papers into pieces, dipping them in a solution of Elmer's glue and water, and strategically affixing the delicate strips to a metal frame—one painstaking layer at a time.

"It's papier-mâché like the little kids do, only with expensive materials," says Smith. What she doesn't mention is the seamlessness of her designs, which appear to be made of continuous panels of luminous, coated paper, rather than a patchwork of scraps. Getting it right requires engineering know-how, a vigilant eye and the patience of Buddha.

The results are worth the wait. Each witty, beguiling shade is unique. (They're

also surprisingly durable.)

As for inspiration, Smith credits the modern sensibilities of sculptor and lamp maker Isamu Noguchi. Her own sometimes-comic imagination does the rest. To come up with new designs, Smith often pictures herself as someone else, then envisions lampshades to go with their lifestyle.

Smith's lampshades are gaining a following among interior designers and architects, as well as private clients. The Canlis restaurant features two of her lampshades, and Fleurish, a flower shop in Madrona, will display several leaf-motif designs. Prices range from \$140 to \$185 (without base). Smith also gladly designs custom lampshades. ■

Insatiable Studios can be reached at (206) 264-0531.

Mia Nicholson is a freelance writer and editor living in Port Townsend.