



# once upon a time...

Creating beautiful tiaras and wedding jewellery, Once Upon a Time Tiaras is a true Hampshire gem, as Sarah Jones discovers



**W**hen Tracy Rees walks into her Hampshire studio, it's like she's stepping into her very own girlie sanctuary.

Living with her husband and three sons, their converted garage is the only part of their home that she can really put a female stamp on.

Gorgeous tiaras twinkle in glass display cases next to a wealth of beautiful wedding jewellery, while dainty hair accessories and shoe clips sparkle and shimmer in the light.

The pieces have all been lovingly designed and crafted by Tracy who set up Once Upon a Time Tiaras back in 2005.

The business has since gone from strength to strength, and the majority of Tracy's business comes via the recommendation of happy brides who have been delighted with her creations.

Formerly a stay-at-home mum, it all started when Tracy was chief bridesmaid for her cousin eight years ago.

"My cousin had bought her tiara and paid a fortune for it, but couldn't find any nice ones for the bridesmaids. I had studied art and fashion at college so I thought I would have a go at making one. My cousin was pleased with it and everyone was commenting on it on her wedding day. They said it was wonderful and that I should go into business making them."

Deciding to dip a tentative toe in the water, Tracy made a few more tiaras and exhibited at a local wedding fair.

"I'm a modest person so I thought no one would actually buy my creations, but

they did," says Tracy. "Taking orders was a big boost, so I kept making more samples and going to wedding fairs. It's been growing each year through word of mouth and friends of friends."

Initially working from the dining room of her home in Marchwood near Southampton, Tracy soon outgrew it – and the family converted their garage into a lovely studio for her three years ago.

She is now one of Lainston House Hotel's recommended suppliers and Tracy's designs are also stocked in Wedded Bliss Bridal Studio in Dibden Purlieu and Gorgeous Gowns in Romsey.

For the mum-of-three, the business has given her the chance to finally exploit her natural artistic talent.

After completing her A-levels, she worked in an office for ten years before starting a family.

"I've always been creative and always found working in accounts a bit stifling, it really wasn't me. Doing this came around purely by chance, but it's the sort of thing I've always wanted to do, and now I can't imagine doing anything else. I love it and it's fab being part of people's weddings."

Initially just making tiaras, Tracy later branched out into making a range of other pieces including combs, hair pins and hair vines.

Using the finest Swarovski crystals and pearls, customers can choose from Tracy's collection or work with her to design their own unique piece, which sometimes even incorporates existing family keepsakes.



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"I offer a friendly and personal service, which many people prefer because going to a bridal shop can sometimes be quite daunting," she says. "It's nice for people to come here and discuss the finer details, especially if it's a bespoke piece. People often bring a photo of their dress and hairstyles they like and we go from there."

In line with the current trend, Tracy has a special vintage-inspired collection which is proving particularly popular with brides at the moment, and a number of her pieces also incorporate lace which is big news for 2012.

For Tracy there really is nothing more important than the finishing touches for a bride's outfit on her big day.

"I think things like tiaras, hair accessories and jewellery are as important as the dress because a bride's face is in every photo, whereas her dress isn't. They just finish the whole look off perfectly."



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