The Macramé Maven
A local designer finds her way home—after a few detours.
BY JANELLE ERLICHMAN DIAMOND

When she was a little girl, Rebecca Irish would make macramé friendship bracelets—"obsessively," she says, "hundreds of millions." Irish, 38, grew up in Towson and attended Towson High School, where she was the "art star." She traveled down 83 to attend MICA and study painting and fine arts. But things change, she says, "when you are in a whole school of art stars."

She always liked to sew, so she took up beading, slowly adding "more fabric and textile stuff." Eventually, she headed to New York City and ended up as a head designer at an eveningwear company. She then spent six months at Nicole Miller doing some macramé and more draping at the design house. But "it didn't suit my personality," she says. Still trying to figure out who she was and what she wanted, Irish headed as far away from Manhattan as she could and ended up in Sonoma, CA. "I took a long break and did a lot of nothing," she admits.

But she found that she missed the East Coast and headed back to Baltimore this past winter—using the blizzards as an excuse to lay low for a while. It was then that she started thinking about her childhood love. People have an idea of what macramé is, she says: "earthy colors, made from hemp." But she felt that she could take macramé to the next level. So she decided to take that concept and refine it. To make her stunning macramé pieces, she uses knitting ribbon that she tea stains or dyes and then manipulating with chains and trinkets.

Irish admits she doesn't wear much jewelry. "But I enjoy making it," she says.

Still, even she has a hard time explaining her creations. "My friends call them eveningwear for the neck," she finally offers. They are slightly over the top, the colors sublime. She loves macramé because the "patterns you can make are so beautiful. I'm more ladylike than edgy. And if there are not a lot of intricacies and labor—I'm not interested."

Her collection is sold locally at Shine Collective and at other stores in the U.S. "I'm excited to see what she's going to produce next," says Jamie Campbell, an old friend and the co-owner of Shine. "She's one of the most talented, prolific designers I've come in contact with."

Irish is happy to be back home. "It's affordable and has a really high percentage of creative people," she says. Here she has the funds for an apartment—she just signed a lease—and eventually a studio. Her number one goal, she says, is to get a dog, and, after that, to come up with a bunch of new design ideas. She wants to dabble in metal and enameling, maybe learn pattern making. "I'm just going to make things, and try to sell things and see what happens," she says. "I think Baltimore is going to be a good place for me."