

Professional Excellence in Jewelry Making & Design

MJSA CUSTOM JEWELER

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INSIGHTS INTO DESIGNING AND MARKETING CUSTOMIZED JEWELRY

TIPS FROM THE TRENCHES

Q: What is an unusual request that you've had from a client that unexpectedly helped your business in some way?

Gary Dawson (Gary Dawson Designs, Eugene, Oregon): A client wanted me to reproduce the Janus charm that Angelina Jolie's character wears in the movie *The Tourist* as a gift for his wife. Created around the Roman god of new beginnings, the two-headed charm is said in the movie to symbolize the two sides of every person—the good and bad, past and future. I saw an opportunity for this commission beyond



the one-off design. Recognizing the market potential for a piece that would resonate in popular culture, I agreed to do the project if the client understood he would get the original for his wife but I would be able to reproduce the charm and sell it.

The project involved serious design work—I had to make my own version of the charm to avoid violating any copyrights or my own ethical values—and hours of hand-carving wax. But it

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Virtually Possible

How to build, organize, and sell a virtual inventory of CAD designs

BY SHARON ELAINE THOMPSON



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Many retail jewelers use CAD as a design tool, but few are currently using it to create a “virtual inventory”—a library of digital renderings ready for review by customers. The two CAD processes are “similar but different,” says Lisa Krikawa, owner of [Krikawa Jewelry Designs](#) in Tucson. Using CAD to design one-offs requires a designer’s imagination and a CAD user’s technical skills. Using it to create a virtual inventory requires skill and imagination too, but also calls for “creating a system,” says Krikawa. Jewelers who use virtual inventories must successfully categorize designs for easy retrieval and customer-friendly searching, much as they would group and display live inventory in a store.

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Unusual Requests that Boost Business

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paid off. I've sold many Janus charms in sterling silver and a few in 14k gold, including to clients in five countries outside the U.S. It was a huge boost to my bottom line.

Jim Tuttle (Green Lake Jewelry Works, Seattle): We get lots of clients with ideas for unusual custom jobs—from a 3-D winged dragon holding an Asscher cut diamond to the Diamond Spider Bling engagement ring with a 2-carat heart-shaped diamond thorax—and they always create a bit of a buzz in the shop. What's great about these requests is that the stranger they are, the more excitement and challenge they add to the job. And, when completed, these unique head-turners usually enhance our portfolio.

Also, by being open to trying new things and never saying no, we attract great artists who like working in an environment that encourages fresh ideas and new approaches—no matter how far out they are. Keeping the talent engaged and excited is important for long-term business growth.

Mark Grosser (M. Grosser Jewelry Design, Indianapolis): Over 20 years ago I made a wedding set for one of the drivers of the Indianapolis 500, and he asked me to make an IndyCar pendant for his wife. I created a three-dimensional replica of the car and it was a hit. I got requests from other



Mark Grosser

drivers, team owners, and racing fans. I even sat at the winners' table at the Indianapolis 500 banquet in 1994 with Al Unser's team and owners because of the jewelry I was making for the chairman of the board of Valvoline.

To this day I continue making this type of jewelry. I probably have the largest selection of racing jewelry anywhere in the world, even though it's not the main focus of my custom jewelry design business. ♦

SECRET SHOP WEAPONS

Jewelers Reveal Their Favorite Tools—and Why They Love Them

Every jeweler has a tool that he or she can't live without. This book offers up dozens of them, as renowned jewelers share those "secret shop weapons" that have helped them speed production, achieve breakthroughs, and breathe a little easier.

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