



FINDING THE PERFECT PIECE

For many, purchasing a piece of jewelry is an impulse buy that isn't given much thought to the piece, the design or the style. It's an extravagant chance of appreciation, where the money spent might not reflect the personal style or taste of the recipient. Discovering said taste is more than bothersome for individuals who don't know the difference among the various jewels, their clarity or the possible settings. And finding someone who can help you demystify the world of jewelry while providing you with excellent customer service, as well as competitive prices, is nearly as difficult as discovering a mechanic you can trust your car with. Or a hairstylist you give complete control to even though they're not the ones that have to walk around with the new cut that went awry. These days, when shopping for personal gifts, people want to get in and get out because that impulse buy is easier than acknowledging the truth: We have no idea what we're shopping for. Until now. Enter the concept of boutique shopping, where local jewelers provide you with education, suggestions and ultimately, the piece you had no idea would fit so perfectly.

BY VANESSA LAPOINTE



The idea of the “boutique” concept in retail has been around for quite some time and has grown even more popular due to its ability to provide customers with the privacy and personal attention that they not only deserve, but are in fact coveting. Whether you’re buying a special piece of lingerie or a luxury automobile, customers are now becoming clients and retailers evolve into personal shoppers. Local jewelers are adopting this concept as well, so that they can assist clients in purchasing expensive, exotic or everyday pieces of jewelry. Jewelry is an investment, and lest we forget, carries history, sentiment and family pride along for centuries, as we inherit and cherish pieces from our ancestors lost. Abbie Batchelder of Batu Designs in Newburyport, Mass., prides herself on expanding family legacies for her clients, as she creates pieces today for children to treasure tomorrow. “My boutique allows me to transform my clients’ tastes into a stylish piece, reflecting their true self. I create each piece individually based on the client before me so that it captures their essence and passion — their jewelry should speak volumes of their individuality, and I create pieces that accentuate that,” explains Batchelder.

At Batu Designs, Batchelder operates under the principle of individual attention and personal satisfaction, allowing clients to dream up their own pieces while offering others an inventory that is handmade, eclectic and original. Not affected by trends, Batchelder quiets her awareness of current fashion and allows her jewelry to be seen as timeless and always interesting. Batu is the Indonesian word for stone, and that element more than any other has held Batchelder captive since a little girl.



Traveling and handpicking all of her materials, Batchelder's passion can be seen in the natural beauty of stones chosen such as yellow turquoise, London blue topaz and the juicy colors of chalcedony. When traveling for precious and semi-precious stones, she's fortunate to experience the different cultures, and then, through handmade pieces that reflect the culture and the client's style, she combines the essence of both, creating pieces that are truly original. "Jewelry has always been my passion. While bead stores and classes are becoming more prevalent in certain areas, it takes a discerning artist's eye to choose and create a truly outstanding piece," says Batchelder.

Along with providing a range of pieces from small and delicate to bold and elegant, she also works with customers to create exactly what they want, and guides them by their individual styles so the end piece is a true fit. Her prices run in the same manner, giving customers the opportunity to experience handmade designs, simple or elegant, at terrific cost, while allowing her clients with more knowledge of her capabilities to create pieces suited to their budgets. "The majority of my work is ready to wear out of the boutique, but it is so much fun to have someone come in with a specific concept, event or special evening that they want something designed for — taking their ideas and turning it into jewelry they'll wear for years to come is such a pleasure," says Batchelder. Batu Designs has a studio in Newburyport where Batchelder's inventory can be perused, or where clients and customers can make appointments to design the next piece, and her work is sold in the Elephant's Trunk as well.

On this side of the state line is jeweler Kim Buxton, who has also taken the boutique concept and integrated it into her business partnership with Bellman's Jewelers. After being an executive in the high-tech industry for over 20 years, Buxton combined a few of her hobbies and transformed them into Bellman's Portsmouth, a boutique in downtown Portsmouth. To go along with the boutique business concept, Buxton created a lofty atmosphere where clients can feel comfortable in choosing their special pieces, while being surrounded by an environment so original, it is simply like no other.

Prior to opening the boutique in Portsmouth, Buxton had at her hands a limited amount of inventory, as her usual business day was consulting with clients about their ideas on the desired piece, and then traveling to that client with a chosen selection matching their needs. Buxton has always held the knack for choosing just the right piece for those ignorant in jewelry selection, starting with the requests for help by her colleagues years ago, to her clients today that put every gift in her hands knowing it will be just perfect. Opening Bellman's Portsmouth allows Buxton to share a larger inventory with her clients at traditional rates with no expensive mark ups, with a unique atmosphere and personal attention.

Her boutique is unlike other jewelry stores in that its atmosphere mimics that of a museum with suede walls, original floors, and a layout that allows clients to peruse the casings of jewelry displayed in non-traditional settings. Buxton prides herself on being different than others in her business concept and store appearance. "I wanted to offer my clients and customers a warm, inviting atmosphere, one

that wasn't commercial but rather intimate so that they could enjoy their time here while we discussed their needs." Offering a quiet luxury, beverages to suit every palette and a private diamond viewing room, Bellman's Portsmouth is cornering the market on private jewelers.

With the goal of offering exceptional customer service along with exclusive quality pieces, Buxton purposefully chose to set the boutique in a fourth floor suite, so that customers would feel inclined to relax, take their time and appreciate the value of choosing the right piece. "We serve to accommodate our clients at their schedules while servicing their needs based on their tastes, desires and budget. We don't want people to feel that a private jeweler is only for those who can afford it, but rather for those that want that level of expertise and assistance in choosing their own," offers Buxton. It's a fascinating puzzle for Buxton, as she unravels the taste and style of each client then delivers a piece seemingly created for just him or her. While jewelry is her passion, so is the education of her clients and their trust in her to choose those special pieces. "I have clients that I've been assisting for years, as well as brand new clients, and my greatest joy is knowing that they trust my intuition as I build a profile suited to their design and luxury needs," explains Buxton.

Above the anniversary reminders, gift-giving suggestions and individual taste profiles is Buxton's overwhelming passion for her clients' satisfaction, as it's a true indicator of their trust in her talent, taste and sense. "The market was just waiting for a jewelry boutique that offered personalized service.




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There's a significant amount of people that are either uneducated when it comes to jewelry so it's most often an impulse buy, or that don't have the time, energy or inclination to learn about jewelry by standing at a mall counter swarmed by sales people," claims Buxton. "Portsmouth was ready for the kind of intimate, personal service I offer — exceptional customer service is a lost art, and it shouldn't be when purchasing special gifts or family heirlooms." Her clients trust her ability to deliver quality pieces perfectly matching their specific styles at costs that don't include the extraordinary markups jewels are so apt to possess. While most of her collection resembles nothing of that in other stores, her promise of best prices can be witnessed by a piece she's selling for \$2900.00, while her competitors have it listed for \$12,000.00.

For many of us, a private jeweler isn't something we deem necessary as we stand in line at the glass counters hoping the clerk will be able to tell us whether or not she'll like it, however we don't have to go into that blindly. When buying that special piece of jewelry, why shouldn't we demand personal attention, individual consultation and an extraordinary selection from someone with an education and respect for our needs? Whether it's a handmade piece designed to capture you inner essence, or exclusive pieces that will one day serve as family heirlooms, jewelers like Batchelder and Buxton aim to serve your every creative wish and desire by helping you choose the perfect piece, with their passion for jewels and desire to provide intimate, personalized and exclusive customer service.