

Master Jeweler, Master Craftsman

By

John Ost

David Olmsted carves, casts, cuts, engraves, molds and preserves memories for his clients. A master jeweler for the past 18 years, David is the owner of A.L. David & Company in where he designs, restores and recreates fine jewelry for his customers in the loft above his store at 505 West Hollis Street in Nashua. He has perfecting his craft for the past 31 years. Wayne Franciose, also a jeweler, works alongside David as an apprentice in the same fashion that David once worked with other master jewelers.

David learned part of his trade by studying with a master engraver who had worked for Van Cleef and Arpel in California for over 60 years. He was then taught the finer points of traditional gun engraving from Sam Alfano, an apprentice to Winston Gordon Churchill of Vermont, who is considered to be one of the top engravers in the world. Every piece crafted by David reflects his training. Just ask his customers.

“As you watch David create a sketch and then its waxed image, it allows you to see his skill and his sense of perfection,” said Ken Grabeau, President of Monarch Industries in Amherst. “David won’t settle for anything less than perfect. He has shown his creativity in numerous works of art for us – and that is what these pieces are – a work of art. David is an artist, a real craftsman. His pieces are truly artistic monuments that speak to a skill that may soon be lost. It is so difficult to find David Olmsted’s in the world.”

David has created several pieces for Ken Grabeau and his wife, Ruth. First, Ken asked David to design a new engagement ring for Ruth. David took her original diamond and set it alongside four larger diamonds in a swag design. David then engraved the underside of the shank beneath the diamond taken from her original ring so that she always knew which diamond was the original.

“She always wears the ring with the original diamond facing towards her middle finger so that if she holds her hand sideways in front of her, it’s closest to her heart,” says Ken Grabeau.

Ruth Grabeau then commissioned a ring for the 25th anniversary of the founding of Ken’s company. Based on the company’s corporate logo, the ring is circular with two arrows sitting side-by-side and pointing upward. The tails of the arrows spiral downward in a gradually decreasing width as they complete their revolutions. David carefully fabricated the 18-carat palladium white gold logo and welded it onto the top of the 18k yellow gold cast ring. He then set 25 perfectly matched diamonds around the top perimeter. Ken Grabeau cannot go anywhere without receiving comments about his ring.

Most recently, the Grabeaus asked David to capture the memories of a fall trip to Australia by incorporating their two new spectacular black opals. The only location in the world to mine these opals is a single locale in Australia. David created a ring and neck enhancer with the opals. Ken Grabeau watched as David carved the wax for the enhancer.

“It is not just David’s artistry,” said Grabeau. “It is also the precision with which he can hand-carve minute detail and create surfaces that measure ten thousandths of an inch in thickness! He has such a practiced eye. As he holds the wax model up to the light, he shaves the wax until the intensity of the light is uniform in thickness, insuring that the gold will spread evenly [when the setting is cast]. We have enjoyed working with David and Lynn in creating these pieces. That experience is a large part of the special nature of the finished piece. We are part of the creation.”

Lynn Olmsted works with her husband at A. L. David. Lynn has sold jewelry for over a dozen years. She is a Graduate Gemologist, (GIA, which is the Gemological Institute of America). The GIA sets the standards for grading diamonds and colored gems. She educates customers about selecting gems and jewelry. She will teach customers that tone (gray scale) and saturation, the depth of color in a gemstone, are the most important considerations when selecting color like emeralds, rubies and sapphires. She explains how the cut of a diamond is as important to its value as weight. The diamond’s cut determines how much light will refract and reflect back to the top, which is what makes it sparkle.

In addition to the craftsmanship, emotional value and education that customers receive, they also expect a good return on their investment, especially a restored piece. Restoration means bringing a piece of jewelry back to its original condition. It means using the same quality and type of gems that were used in the original piece of jewelry. It means consulting with a graduate gemologist to determine whether the original gems were genuine or synthetic. It means knowing your limits and not cutting corners.

“I don’t cut gemstones or cast platinum,” said David. “I select the best gems and then send them out to a cutter in New York if they need to be recut. They are the same color, material and cut as the original gems. I try to find the best people in world to do what I can’t do. For example, I have four platinum casters and each project will govern which one I send it to. I do not introduce foreign materials into a piece. If the metal was platinum, it remains platinum. A lot of guys today use white gold to work on platinum and that devalues the piece by up to 30 percent. I am a purist. In Europe, you cannot have white gold with nickel. Here in the states you can. I choose to work with nickel-free alloys whenever possible. I am like one of the old guys. I work the way the old jewelers do.”

Because he works in the tradition of the old masters, David adds value to the pieces he restores. An antique dealer purchased a watch in disrepair for \$700.00. The watch was made of custom-cut natural black jade beads, seed pearls and apple green jade. He dyed the pearls to match the original color and restored the hand-engraved etchings. He even

made the tools needed to reassemble the watch. He charged the dealer \$1300 for the restoration. The dealer later sold the watch for \$9000. Such are the rewards of working with a true master craftsman.

A.L. David is open from 10a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday. David prefers to work by appointment. You can talk to David or Lynn by calling 603-595-1997 or emailing them at info@aldavid.com.