

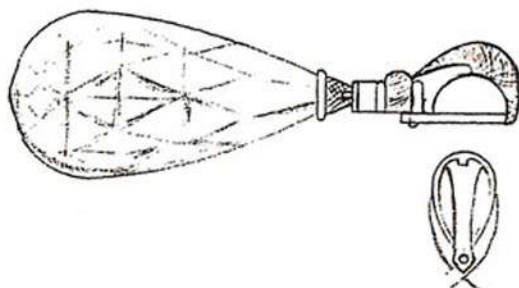
*E*xpress yourself

AMETRINE BRIOLETTE PENDANT

AND EARRINGS. JEWELRY BY

CYNTHIA RENÉE CO.

COLOR RENDERING OF JEWELRY THAT
WILL BE BASED ON THE CURVED,
SYMMETRICAL DESIGN MOTIF OF
CHINESE FROG CLOTHING FASTENERS.



The Pleasures of Custom-Designed Jewelry

CYNTHIA MARCUSSON
CYNTHIA RENÉE CO.

Years ago an incredible Caribbean blue tourmaline came into my possession. I wanted to house it in a piece of jewelry, but it had to be exactly right, and, at that time, no inspiration came. Several years later, on a climbing vacation, I descended into a glacial crevasse. There before me, and all around me, was ice the exact color of the tourmaline I had held onto for so long. It struck me that the stone should be put into a ring that would bring this experience back to me whenever I wore it. Arriving home, I set about designing the piece. I wrapped the stone, along with two flanking emeralds, in platinum to enhance its cool and icy feel. In profile, the ring, which I call "Ice Ice Baby," is shaped a lot like Mt. Rainier, site of the magnificent crevasse.

Maybe you, too, have a gem with special meaning. Or you'd like to commemorate an event with something more lasting than snapshots. Or perhaps you just like to express your true spirit in what you wear. A piece of jewelry that is custom-designed—to your unique needs and style—may be the way to go. Often, in fact, it is only a custom-designed piece of jewelry that can embody a memory, a personal experience or your own personal symbology. But, yikes, you may say, how does one go about getting a piece of jewelry designed?

For most people, even those who can easily match a fabric swatch with wallpaper and a sofa style, designing jewelry is way out of their comfort zone. Because few are experienced with it,

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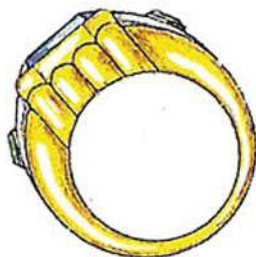
the designing and manufacturing of jewelry represents more or less of a last frontier for those wanting something completely unique and personal. Like many frontiers, once you view it, the vista irresistibly calls you. And, like any large distance, it's best covered in steady small steps. But when you're done, you will have a finished piece of jewelry that is not only unlike any other, anywhere, but that also combines design, texture, line and color that express the very essence of you.

What's Your Design Style?

You may not think you have a design style, but assuredly you do. When I begin to design personalized jewelry, I study my client's clothing style and ask her about her home furnishings. Recurring design motifs and philosophies often mirror all aspects of a person's life. A dear friend likes her jewelry very architectural in style, with crisp straight lines. Her design preference is also evident in her very tailored, no-nonsense taste in clothes (She wouldn't be "caught dead" in a flowery print.) and in her very straight-lined striped sofa.

As for me, I have a curved sofa and eclectic collections of treasures. While I must have a strong symmetrical element, I really gravitate to rounded forms. And this comes out in my jewelry design preferences, i.e., the "Chinese Button" and "Ice Ice Baby" ring featured on these pages.

So, too, many things can inspire design styles. It may start with a shape you like that has nothing at all to do with jewelry. I've always loved the curves and symmetry of Chinese frog clothing fasteners. With that as inspiration, we came up with a jewelry design we call the "Chinese Button," which uses briolette gemstones. Look at the photos on the accompanying pages of the Chinese Button ametrine briolette pendants and earrings. Can you see the hint of the original frog buttons and how the motif was translated into jewelry?



COLOR RENDERINGS, PREPARED BY

THE DESIGNER, FOR A PROPOSED RING

USING THE BLUE TOURMALINE.

Getting Professional Help

One of the scariest aspects of venturing into custom jewelry design is the idea that you have to go it alone—when you're hard-pressed to draw a stick figure. But there are trained designers out there to help you, every step of the way—even if you have only a vague idea, a creative professional can help you to put together the elements for a piece of jewelry that hits your target. But you need to feel confident that that creative someone can translate your ideas and longings into that finished piece of jewelry. The designer needs to be able to transform intangible feelings into a tangible piece that represents those sentiments. You don't have to design it yourself; an expert will help you.

But what you do look for? How do you find a Jeweler who can

competently and creatively guide you through this process? How can you tell if somebody is an expert? One of the best ways is through word-of-mouth recommendations from friends who have had successful experiences with a Jeweler. Visit some fine jewelry stores; are there certain stores where you just feel more comfortable when you walk in? Do you feel a certain rapport and confidence? Are the Jeweler and salespeople easy to communicate with; do they listen and do you have confidence in their professionalism? Do the jewelry pieces in their cases speak to you, and are they comfortable when you try them on?

Most jewelry designers are proud of their work and will have a portfolio of past creations. Leaf through their portfolios with them—do you like what you see? A good designer will make you a nice piece of jewelry; a great designer will really listen to you and create what you have in mind—not what she most likes to make. Sometimes the photos in the portfolio may not be styles to your liking, or even the Jeweler's style, but they indicate that the designer has listened to the client and produced something of beauty, value and structural competence that reflects the wearer's own tastes.

It's not necessary that the Jeweler have a metalsmith on staff. Some of the best pieces of jewelry are created through a customer's collaboration with a designer who then subcontracts the manufacturing of the piece to a trusted craftsperson. A Jeweler will typically work with a variety of metalsmiths for different types of projects.

One may be better in gold, another in platinum; one may be great with tension mounting and another a master with rounded forms or intricate wax carving. The Jeweler will select the one who's best for your project.

Also, don't be put off if the salesperson or jewelry store owner doesn't have the official title of "jewelry designer." I've seen beautiful jewelry pieces and some of the happiest customers result from a good salesperson who is skilled at interpreting the client's ideas to the craftsman who actually manufactures the piece. Select someone with whom you feel you can communicate, who is professional and has your best interests at heart.

How Much Will It Cost?

Do you have a budget in mind? This matters to the jewelry designer as he or she will know what type of engineering to undertake with the piece and what materials to use. A custom-made jewelry piece doesn't necessarily cost more than a stock-produced piece. It's almost never going to be less expensive than a stock piece, but it can be comparably priced. There are a wide range of price options and various ways to be creative and produce a jewelry piece within your budget. An experienced designer can guide you through this process and make the appropriate suggestions. Sometimes it may not even be necessary to custom-make a piece as you may find you really love a piece that is already part of a manufac-

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**THE FINISHED TOURMALINE RING SET IN
EIGHTEEN-KARAT YELLOW AND WHITE
GOLD, CALLED "ICE ICE BABY" FOR THE
GLACIAL CREVASSE WHICH INSPIRED ITS
DESIGN. JEWELRY BY CYNTHIA RENÉE CO.**

turing designer's line. In that case, bear in mind that copyright infringement and the cost of "reinventing the wheel" make such direct copying inadvisable.

Deciding If It's Right

Many often fear that seeing the design sketched on paper isn't enough to let them know what the finished three-dimensional piece will look like. Fortunately there is an important interim step between paper and reality, and that is the wax model. Typically the Jeweler will first carve your creation to scale out of wax. This model will later be used to cast and manufacture the finished metal jewelry piece. You can try on the wax model and see what its actual finished size and form will be. During the wax stage, it is much easier to make any changes, as wax is more pliable and certainly less expensive than gold, silver or platinum. It is like trying on a muslin jacket for a pattern fit before the pattern is cut out of the costly final fabric. If any changes are to be made, that is the time to do it. Viewing the wax is also a preventive measure that can eliminate any conceptual misunderstanding between client and Jeweler.

The Result

In the end, you will have a unique piece that has special meaning just for you. It may use stones from your grandmother's brooch, it may remind you of a special place you've been or the color of the sky off that particular beach you'll never forget, or it may simply stand out unmistakably as your personal style. Either way, it will have been well worth the slight extra effort it entailed. For when people ask you—and they will!—where you found that stunning ring or brooch or pair of earrings, secretly planning to run right out and find something similar, you can just respond with your best Mona Lisa smile. ■

As principal of Cynthia Renée Co., Cynthia Marcusson gets a first-hand look at colored stones from the mines to the marketplace. Her company specializes in providing exceptional colored stones for custom jewelry design.



**A CARIBBEAN-BLUE INDICOLITE
TOURMALINE WHICH THE AUTHOR
WANTED TO SET IN AN APPROPRIATE
PIECE OF JEWELRY. GEMSTONE
FROM CYNTHIA RENÉE CO.,
PHOTO BY WELDON.**