

From the moment you step inside this jewelry design shop, it is an experience that is anything but ordinary. Soft techno rhythms hit against aged brick walls and bounce off the tops of the jewelry cases to the lights dangling from towering ceilings in this downtown space.

Goldsmith Silversmith owner Dwaine Ferguson began making jewelry in 1967 in San Francisco, and now specializes in custom jewelry design and local artisan work in Omaha's Old Market. You can find everything from gold, silver, and platinum to custom beading, precious stones, and semi-precious stones.

Dwaine's mission statement exemplifies his personalized way of doing business. He says he truly believes, "If you can think it, we can make it," which is stated on www.goldsmithsilversmith.com.

Talented and inventive by nature, Dwaine developed his creative techniques as an architectural draftsman. He designed metal furniture, outdoor sculpture, and even buildings, and his craft eventually evolved into jewelry. He taught jewelry-making classes, and later taught adult education classes in Bellevue and Plattsmouth. In the mid-1970s, he started working part-time in a jewelry store and after eventually buying it, he went on to design some of the most unique pieces of jewelry to be found in the metro area, he says.

Dwaine points out that his shop can do everything jewelry-related, although not necessarily on-site. If a service is not provided in-house, such as engraving, he knows someone who can do the work.

Goldsmith Silversmith is more than your average jewelry store, Dwaine comments. "Everyone sells, but all of my employees are jewelers, not just salespeople." About half of the work done in his shop is custom-designed for clients who are looking for something one-of-a-kind.

The pieces are created in two workspaces located in the building. "Customer service is a huge factor," explains Dwaine, who consults with clients and determines what they want, what can and cannot be done, and how to produce it for them. It takes gaining a certain understanding about each customer to allow new and original designs to be made for them, he adds.

Dwaine says that while rings and wedding bands are certainly the top-selling items in his shop, they also offer earrings, bracelets, necklaces, broaches, cuff links, money clips, gold keys, and more. Trends can sometimes dictate what is sold. For instance, recently people have been more interested in silver than gold and in having new pieces made out of old jewelry or broken scraps. Such trends have been influenced by the state of global economies and the impact on local consumers. Despite this challenge, he says, "People still like to have their sparkly bangles."

Goldsmith Silversmith offers clients not just a place to shop, but a collaborative design experience. "It is exciting working with people to make something new happen in various ways," Dwaine shares. One example of this is helping a couple design their wedding bands and getting them involved in what the finished products will look like. "It is a special thing to share in the process of rings becoming wedding symbols," he states. "It is something forever precious for that couple."

Goldsmith Silversmith offers more than your typical white diamonds and traditional settings often found in other jewelry stores. While those are still available, Dwaine says he prefers to experiment with unconventional metals and gems like black, yellow, and champagne diamonds. He says such jewelry is popular for people who are getting remarried or getting married for the first time later in life and have a more distinct personal taste.

Dwaine believes that his jewelry is simply better than what other jewelers offer when it comes to quality and personalized design. He says that most recognizable jewelers are popular because they got started in the right place at the right time and were able to develop a big name. What you do not get with big-name jewelers is the personalized service offered at Goldsmith Silversmith, he adds. "You can come in here and talk to the owner," says Dwaine. "You do not have to, but I am here." This is something he knows sets him apart not only from other jewelers, but from other local businesses as well, he shares.

Dwaine says it makes him feel good to give people something

they can be proud of that they like to show off or keep for sentimental value. One client's son had drawn a heart, for example, and Dwaine was able to make the drawing come to life as a gift for his mother to wear. He has clients he sold jewelry to 30 years ago who come back in town and tell him how many people grab their hand to look at their jewelry. "It's amazing to see people get excited about that," he shares. In fact, he has several clients across the United States and abroad who like to buy unique items from Goldsmith Silversmith, from Montana and Toronto all the way to Paris.

What people might not know about the shop is the wide array of loose gemstones and unusual strands available to make a truly individual piece of wearable art. Not only that, but Dwaine be-

lieves that he has a larger assortment of pearls than anywhere else in Omaha.

With a vast inventory to work with and a knowledgeable staff of designers, Dwaine shares that one of the best parts about the work he does is simply enjoying it. "I like coming to work every day. Everyone is here because they like to be involved, not just as salespeople but as jewelers."

Dwaine advises potential buyers to look for jewelry designers who have experience before they choose to work with a particular shop. He explains that it takes a great deal of listening to get a feel for what each person likes and dislikes. Some people know exactly what they want, and they show him a picture or a drawing or an old piece of jewelry and he can create or re-create it. Other times people have only an idea, and it takes more than 40 sketches to find the right piece. But that is part of what makes his work so appealing because the client can be involved in the design process from a rough beginning to a polished finish, he says.

You can find Dwaine Ferguson and Goldsmith Silversmith professional jewelry designers in the heart of the Old Market in Omaha. For your next piece of unique wearable art, you may want to visit them downtown at 1019 Howard Street or call 402-342-1737.

GOLDSMITH SILVERSMITH

By Brittany Nicolle Willis



Dwaine Ferguson, owner