

Several years ago, when my younger brother called to say he would be asking his then-girlfriend to marry him, my first question (being a typical woman and big sister) was about the ring. "Oh, I can email you a sketch," he said. "I am designing it with her family jeweler." Well, there wasn't much I could argue with about that. So, he got the ring, proposed, she said yes, they got married, and they are living happily ever after.

There is one thing that bothered me: I still didn't have a family jeweler of my own. Fate intervened, fortunately, when I had the opportunity to visit Dwaine Ferguson, jewelry designer and owner of Goldsmith Silversmith.

A fixture in the Old Market, Dwaine tells me that he has been in his current location for 40 years as of this coming February. He has designed and sold fine jewelry to a cast of thousands, including both local clients and quite a few celebrities. Though he enjoys meeting everyone that walks into his shop, he says it has been fun to meet the occasional celebrity. He shares that Liberace once visited the store; and Goldie Hawn has a pair of Dwaine's Tahitian pearl and champaign diamond earrings. Who would have thought that what started out as a hobby would turn into a successful and interesting business, with a few twists and turns along the way?

Growing up on a ranch in north-central Nebraska, Dwaine wanted to be an architect. However, it was while he was working as an architectural draftsman that he began experimenting with jewelry design as a hobby. "I wanted to sell just enough to buy a sports car," which, he recalls, he was able to do.

By that time, however, Dwaine found his career path changing, and acted upon an opportunity to buy a fledgling jewelry store. The business was originally known as "Silversmith" when Dwaine purchased it from a couple (non-jewelers themselves) that had started it just two years before. At the time, about 90 percent of their sales were silver pieces. Dwaine says that he slowly began introducing more items done in gold and other precious metals. For a short time, the store was known as "Silversmith Goldsmith," but eventually it was decided that Goldsmith Silversmith had a nicer ring to it (pardon the pun).

Although he is a small business owner, Dwaine says that he is always a jewelry designer first. He tells me his motto, "Dare to be different," has, and continues to, set him apart from his competitors. He tells me there are approximately 80 places that sell jewelry in the Omaha area; but Dwaine believes that his bold and uncommon eye (and hand) for design allows him to create and sell pieces that put Goldsmith Silversmith in a class of its own. "One of my diamond dealers refers to herself as 'the best diamond dealer,'" he explains. "I decided to refer to myself as 'the best jewelry designer,' and I believe I am."

This kind of confidence may sound brazen, but Dwaine has learned the importance of being an advocate for himself and his work. Designs are imitated and stolen from artists all the time, he explains; and while it may seem flattering, the original designer rarely receives any of the credit.

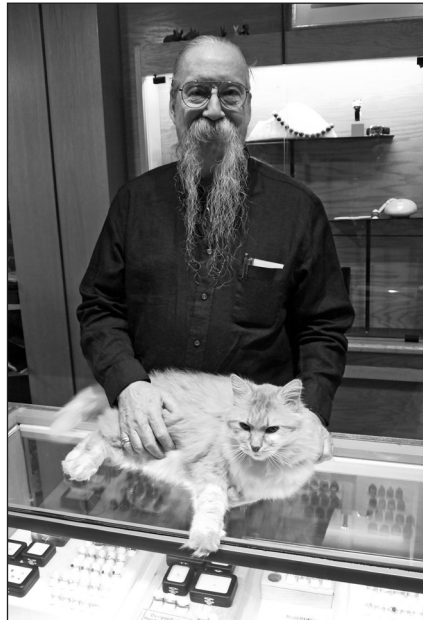
It is worth noting, however, that many of Dwaine's custom

jewelry clients initially come into the store with a photograph of something they have seen in another place and wish to replicate the look. While Dwaine can't make the same design, he can make a version of it, incorporating the client's favorite features, and then adding or eliminating others. The custom piece, he explains, is typically less expensive, and ends up being a one-of-a-kind work of art. "Keep in mind," Dwaine shares, "there are more than 500 patents on what you and I would consider a basic round-cut diamond; but there are nearly infinite ways to showcase it in a piece of jewelry."

GOLDSMITH SILVERSMITH

Daring to Create Unique Fine Jewelry

By Julie Kuntze



Dwaine Ferguson, jewelry designer

"I have been using Goldsmith Silversmith for over 10 years," says local customer Mary Lou Brasee. "Dwaine and his staff provide customer service second to none. I think people get scared at what custom jewelry may cost. On the contrary, I've had several wonderful custom pieces designed and Dwaine's prices are very reasonable."

Goldsmith Silversmith sells a wide variety of jewelry, both ready-made and custom pieces. The store showcases items created by Dwaine himself, but also carries pieces from local designers, and staff members, Heather and Danielle; as well as a few select pieces from more distant collections.

Items range in price from less than \$20 to—well, on up from there. "At some point," Dwaine says, "price is a factor for almost everyone." If someone has a budget or a price range they are looking for, the staff at Goldsmith Silversmith can certainly guide them toward pieces that fit those parameters. Dwaine works with a wide variety of metals and gemstones, from the common, but beautiful to the exotic and extremely rare. Among all the materials and gems he works with, Dwaine says that pearls are his favorite. He literally has a selection of thousands at Goldsmith Silversmith.

When a client requests a custom piece of jewelry, he or she may or may not have any idea of what they want. "I, or another designer in the store, can guide them through the process. We start with a few basic questions, like 'What metal do you like? What shape?'" The sketch comes next. Dwaine uses architectural paper for its weight and transparency. He can easily draw several versions of a similar piece; or create multiple pieces to be worn together, such as an engagement ring and wedding band.

As a small business owner, Dwaine shares that the store is never far from his thoughts, even when he is trying to relax with some kind of "mind-numbing T.V." in the evening. "I enjoy it," he says of his work. "It's fun. I like being here. My head is full of ideas, and I get to bring some of them through to an end product."

Currently, he has five staff members, all of whom are involved in some aspect of jewelry design. "It can be overwhelming to think that I am, in some ways, responsible for these people," says Dwaine. The paycheck they earn allows them to have their own private lives; and the safety of the store is something that Dwaine is always monitoring.

Goldsmith Silversmith is located at 1019 Howard Street. For more information, including hours of business, or to speak with a Goldsmith Silversmith designer, please call 402-342-1737, or visit the website at www.goldsmithsilversmith.com. **WE**