

Goldsmith Silversmith

Jewelry for Those Who Dare to be Different

By Marge Shoemaker



Dwaine Ferguson,
owner

Dwaine Ferguson, owner of Goldsmith Silversmith, dares to be different. He hails from the village of Brewster, which the 2010 census listed a population of 17, and is the smallest incorporated county seat (Blaine County in north central Nebraska) in the state. Having recently passed his

final exam from the Gemology Institute of America in the study of pearls, he claims expertise in the knowledge and use of pearls. His appearance also differs from the norm—he sports a long, Fu Manchu-like mustache and a ponytail, both of which make him look like the artist he is. Besides pearls, Dwaine's expertise lies in designing and handcrafting beautiful jewelry—all works of art—for his clients.

Dwaine's artistic background is based in his studies as an architectural draftsman. In the beginning of his architectural career, he worked for a large company, but soon found he didn't want to wear white shirts and black suits everyday—as evidenced by the day he was sent home to change when he dared to show up for work wearing a light blue shirt. He ultimately joined a smaller company, but still felt the need to be his own boss and find an outlet for his creativity. In the early 1970s, he started Goldsmith Silversmith.

Dwaine believes in customer service. He tells of customers asking him to design a piece of jewelry. Sometimes they have a stone that needs a setting or an inherited piece that they want updated, but have concerns that the value of the piece will be diminished. Dwaine assures them that the stone's value will be maintained—and even enhanced—in the new piece. For each client, Dwaine conducts an initial interview. "I want to know the person before I do the work," he says. He is a genial conversationalist. From our interview, it was easy to see how he is able to determine a person's personality. With each commission, he meets with the client prior to sketching his ideas for the piece. After the client has approved the drawing, a wax mock-up is created and adjusted to the client's tastes. Finally, the piece is completed. This process leaves little room for dissatisfaction from the client and avoids wasting precious materials in an unsatisfactory design. There are times a client wants a previously designed piece. In that case, Dwaine pulls the wax mock-up and makes necessary changes in color, material, or size to suit the new owner.

Dwaine is always thinking of designs and has stacks of books containing more than 2,000 design ideas. When asked where he finds inspiration he

replies, "Everywhere. I try to keep aware of current fashions and that inspires me. Sometimes designs just pop into my head." He spends a lot of time doodling, too. He is an artist in heart and soul. "Currently the hot new thing is white gold. Designs inspired by nature are popular. People are usually swayed by current fashions, so I try to keep up," he says. Some of his designs are showcased on Goldsmith Silversmith's website. Others are displayed in cases around the shop.

As mentioned previously, Dwaine has acquired extensive knowledge of pearls. They are much more than strands of small white or yellowish "beads." According to Dwaine, pearls come in a variety of sizes, colors, and shapes. Color and shape are determined by the "host" (which is not always an oyster, but rather shellfish of all types including mussels, clams, and abalone), water salinity, and feeding matter. The temperature of the water also determines the size of the pearls. Today, most pearls are cultured—induced artificially. However, the Keshi pearl is a natural pearl that is accidentally created during the culturing process of other pearls. He showed me one of his pieces, a gorgeous bracelet made of several parallel-joined strands of flat, oblong-shaped pearls in a variety of colors ranging from light to dark. Dwaine describes his love of pearls as an addiction. "I have more than any other place in Omaha," he declares. "I collect rather than sell them."

Goldsmith Silversmith also carries jewelry made by partners, other artists (some of whom have worked at the shop), and friends. Most of the designs displayed in the shop are unique and "one of a kind." Some are duplicates of other works or based on designs of other pieces. Dwaine and his artisans all strive for customer satisfaction. They specialize in handcrafted jewelry using precious metals such as gold, silver and platinum, custom beading, and precious or semi-precious stones.

Goldsmith Silversmith is located in the Old Market area of Omaha at 1019 Howard Street. They can be reached by phone at 402-342-1737. A sampling of designs can be seen at their website, www.goldsmithsilversmith.com. **WE**