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Style Trends

Finding the Right Jeweler

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Within every trade or industry, not everyone is created equal, and this insight certainly applies to the jewelry trade. Rather than try to tell which jewelers are better and which ones are worse by some simplistic criteria that supposedly separate goodies from baddies, it's better to shed light on the considerations involved in finding the jeweler who is likely to be most suitable for your wildlife jewelry needs.

There are independent jewelers and chain stores that buy and sell the standard commercial items from souvenirs and zodiac charms to mainstream bridal jewelry. Some of them might provide a reliable repair service and do basic alterations, all at a more or less reasonable price and acceptable quality just as there are family restaurants that offer the equivalent of grandma's home cooking.

As with a high-end specialty restaurant, a similarly rare breed of high-end jewelers have the capacity to advise you on everything from the stones to the metals and the actual design of a potentially complex project. But since the prefer-

ences of their patrons range from the eclectic to the exotic, such studios also have an established network that allows them to procure stones and similar goodies from all over the world just for you to indulge in. Such service and sophistication is anything but mainstream and involves time and expertise, and both have their price.

Against such a background of wide and rich variety, it becomes easier to imagine that only very few studios have sufficient demand to specialize in hunting and wildlife jewelry exclusively. Your best approach is not to assume anything at all, as it is likely that the vast majority of jewelers never had a request for that magnificently executed animal motif, or a custom order to create a stunning objet d'art with a customer's trophy.

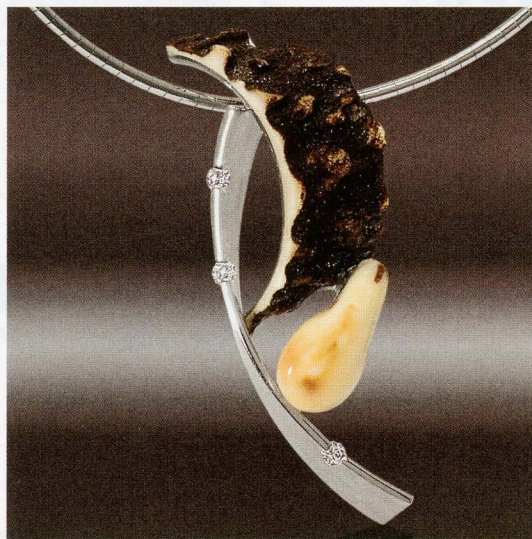
It is a very special kind of challenge to gain a firm grasp of the subtleties of animal anatomy, and all but the most talented professionals will be able to succeed without a solid background in the arts. "There were many years of trial and error—mostly error," Richard Koskovich of Homer, AK recalls in a disarmingly down-to-earth way. Taking

the subject further by creating a truly successful artistic alteration or stylization poses the ultimate demand upon the executing craftsperson's skills.

Madeleine Kay of Littlerock, CA confirms, "I have an extensive research file I started in 1975." In a world where the mainstream definition of fine jewelry tends to be along the lines of precious metals and diamonds, possibly some colored stones and pearls, most commercial jewelers are likely to tell you their return on investing in such manner of know-how is simply not warranted.

In a scenario where wildlife jewelry contains organic materials from trophy components, or what gemologists refer to as organics for short, there is a whole other set of challenges. Contrary to gemstones and precious metals, organics are porous. This imposes limits on standard processing, cleaning and maintenance procedures. As a result, you and the jeweler entrusted with looking after your valuable finery need to be informed about the potential pitfalls that come with organics.

Once you feel like you have honed-in on a viable candidate, don't be afraid to ask whether they have a lot of demand for wildlife jewelry and other organics. It certainly doesn't hurt to chat them up a little about their background to get a better idea of the breadth and depth of their expertise. "I had already been a practicing wildlife artist creating paintings and sculpture and wanted to add fine jewelry to my repertoire," Dan Toledo



Tiroler Goldschmied pendant. A highly unusual design with an equally unusual choice of materials by Tiroler Goldschmied of Dorf Tirol, Italy, featuring 18k (750) yellow and white gold, diamonds, deer antler and "Grandeln" (German: deer molars, typically the molars of red deer stags)

Photograph courtesy of © Manuela Prossliner/
www.tirolergoldschmied.com



Madleine Kay Marco Polo Sheep. This pendant of a Marco Polo sheep in yellow gold and diamonds by Madleine Kay of Littlerock, CA, impresses as much with its choice of materials as it does with its close attention to detail. It is certainly not what you would expect to find at even the highest-end fine jewelry store. Photograph courtesy of © Madleine Kay.

of Toledo Wildlife in Whittier, CA explains. Ask for photos of work a potential prospect has done in the past for you to "ooh" and "aah" over. Not only will you gain a better idea who you are dealing with, but great work is also pure fun and enjoyment to look at and discuss.

Remember, in the digital age every self-respecting studio keeps photographic records of what they produce, and the real pros typically carry a smartphone or a tablet computer souped-up with all the memory it can handle for the sole purpose of having their extensive photo gallery on them at all times so they can proudly present it at the faintest of cues.

In the end, it is up to you to distinguish between those who are competent in that area and filter out those whose experience and talents lie elsewhere. The few studios that specialize in wildlife jewelry are not likely to be high-profile brands, and therefore harder to spot, whether you are looking in glossy magazines, on the web or combing a city's main strip. The majority are one-person enterprises that serve a select crowd on the basis of word-of-mouth, nowadays perhaps word-of-text.

Or, check around the floor of the SCI Convention. Any jewelers there have a passion for hunting and the art of hunting or they would not be at the SCI Convention. 🐾

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