

SMALL BUSINESS



Ted and Matthew Blum (left and center) create custom jewelry and repair existing pieces. Barry Belenke manages vintage retail operations.

Jewelers Services

Established: 1995

Employees: 3

Address: 31 N. Tejon St., Suite 206

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ilikejewelry.com

Low-key jewelers add vintage touch

By Bryan Grossman

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For 20 years, a hidden gem has been housed above The Famous Steakhouse on North Tejon.

Several gems, actually.

For two decades Ted Blum's Jewelers Services has quietly built custom jewelry and repaired nearly anything, from costume pieces to engagement rings to works of art. But at the beginning of the year, the business added a vintage jewelry component that allows customers to buy, sell and consign old jewelry.

"It's like your favorite jewelry repair place just opened a vintage showroom. It couldn't get any better if you put a Starbucks in here," said showroom curator Barry Belenke.

A rolling stone

Ted Blum first was introduced to crafting jewelry while living in Southern California. It was there he attended the Gemological Institute of America and apprenticed before moving to the East Coast in the late 1970s. He found his way to Colorado Springs in 1983, where he worked as a freelancer for various jewelry stores before landing a full-time job locally with Zerbe Jewelers.

In 1995, he set off on his own and moved to a small office adjacent to his current location on the second floor of the century-and-a-quarter-old former bank at 31 N. Tejon Street.

"I had a small list of personal clientele," Blum said of his earliest years of self-employment. "The majority of my work at the beginning was contracts for various jewelers and, over the years, the contract work phased out and I was lucky enough to develop clientele of my own. It's been growing slow and steady ever since."

To help with that growth, Blum's son Matthew joined him in 2001.

Today, the two bench jewelers create custom pieces, set stones, appraise works and assist in the newly added

vintage operations by cleaning, adjusting and polishing all merchandise.

"We fix a lot of things other jewelers turn away because it's small potatoes," Matthew said. "We try to look at the bigger picture. If we help someone with something small today, they may send their kid in for a wedding ring later."

'Nice vibe'

Belenke also worked at Zerbe, where he launched its vintage and estate jewelry department. Through that employment, he met Ted. Both were looking to grow professionally and an underutilized room adjacent to the jewelers' workshop would provide the means. The space began its transformation into a vintage showroom in January.

"[Ted] has a wonderful following and wonderful customers," Belenke said. "But his time is 100 percent occupied by fixing things and making jewelry."

"My background is in retail vintage jewelry and has been for close to 20 years," he said. "They had this space and I thought, 'What a nice room.' It had a really nice vibe to it."

The retail portion of the business has acquired more than 300 pieces in the three months since opening, Belenke said, adding that almost all of them are from customers who were already utilizing Blum's repair and custom design services.

"People have things sitting in their drawers for 20 or 30 years," Belenke said. "They loved it when they got it, but maybe haven't worn it in a decade. They think somebody else would probably love it and they want to find a new home for it."

Belenke added that vintage jewelry is a huge wedding trend.

"Young brides love vintage jewelry," he said. "Even if you look at brand new stuff — a lot of inventory [at chain stores] is vintage-inspired."

Belenke said there's an appeal to pieces with stories, and the showroom features jewelry from all over the world. A bonus to vintage, he said, is that it's affordable.

"You have to like the style and it should be in excellent condition, but you might find something similar to a new, \$1,000 ring for \$400 or \$500."

Belenke said there's a tipping point where vintage may be worth more than new.

"Two things: If it's over 100 years old, that can increase its value. And, if it's a brand name — a Cartier ring from the 1920s will be worth more than a non-Cartier that looks just like it. Quality stones and style have a lot to do with cost."

Old-fashioned

According to Ted, prior to the vintage showroom, about 60 percent of business came from repairs. He said that should shift now that the company has the resources to devote to a retail component, and they can spend more time creating custom pieces the old-fashioned way.

Ted creates lost wax castings, where a hand-carved wax model is melted from a plaster of Paris mold and replaced with liquefied precious metal. The plaster is broken, leaving the piece prior to setting stones.

Additionally, Matthew recently completed training in hand engraving, which he calls "a lost art."

Matthew said his industry, like most, has advanced with the times, to include laser welding and 3-D printing, but most technology is cost-prohibitive.

"An entry-level 3-D printer is about \$15,000," he said, adding he and his father keep things simple.

"We use a torch, a file and a rotary tool," Matthew said. "Those are the three main things. With laser welding, you can weld a wire to a pearl. You can't do that with a torch. But we can do 99 percent of the things out there." • CSBJ

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