

Behind the Design

A pair of local collectors open up their respective jewelry boxes to reveal the pieces that got them hooked — and what keeps them coming back for more

BY JOURDAN FAIRCHILD

LAURIE DAVIS

“It’s addictive, like a drug,” admits Laurie Davis of her obsession for collecting costume jewelry. Lucky for her, she can get her fix while making a living as the owner of Lulu’s at the Belle Kay, a high-end vintage shop in North Center. To fill the racks in her elegant boutique, Davis has spent the past 10 years traveling the world spotting top-notch pieces to sell alongside luxurious fur coats and couture gowns.

How did she develop such a keen eye for accessories? An entire lifetime of admiration. Influenced by her half-Italian and half-Spanish heritage, Davis began receiving gifts of gold jewelry at birth. And when her father, an international businessman, returned home from trips, he’d have charms for his daughters’ bracelets and jewelry for his wife. But Davis’s love for jewelry jumped up a notch while the family was living in Mexico for four months, and a 16-year-old Davis spied a sterling silver bracelet that made her heart skip a beat. That stunning piece — along with at least 250 others — make up her current personal collection, which fills rows of custom-built shelves in her dressing room at home.

“These days, it takes a lot to rock my world,” says Davis, who’s partial to designers such as Selro, Napier and Ciner. “But unless you own the crown jewels or you’re Elizabeth Taylor, fine jewelry cannot do what this stuff can do,” she says. “Why would I want to wear some ‘twinkle’ diamond necklace when I could put on something extraordinary?”

Davis does admit that the bigger-is-better mentality can be a bit intimidating at first. Years ago, a woman came into the shop and declared that costume jewelry just “wasn’t her.” But she wanted to branch out, so Davis sold her a chunky bracelet. The customer wore the bracelet while dining at Gibsons Bar & Steakhouse a few days later, and at least five people paid her compliments. “That was her turning point,” Davis says, “and



Laurie Davis inside her home closet.

she never looked back.”

Davis and her team rotate the collection according to season, displaying the baubles based on color along a table near the register. “To me, these are pieces of art, and I don’t ever tire of looking at them,” she says. As for how and where she finds her treasures? “I’d have to kill you if I told you,” she says with a wink.



Davis' Collection

1. Napier: "This comes from one of the oldest manufacturers in jewelry. When I saw this and put it on, it just felt right."

2. Richard Kerr: "They're very classic. They give the right amount of punch to an outfit."

3. Iradj Moini: "This bird is a work of art. I've worn it once to a private preview of Elizabeth Taylor's jewelry auction."

4. Iradj Moini: "I have a penchant for square rings. I'm very attracted to green and love this stone. It's very important looking, isn't it?"

5. Iradj Moini: "I love shell jewelry; there is something very organic about it."

Levy's Collection

6. Gevri: "This is a limited edition, No. 13 out of 500 made, and the first nice watch I bought for myself."

7. Stührling Original: "I wear this a lot. It's not too fancy or gaudy; it's easy on the eyes."

8. Red cufflinks: "They're slightly reflective. I can't figure out what it was, but it looks like a coin, which is interesting."

9. Black and white cufflinks: "My brothers got these for me at Haberdash [611 N. State]. My name means 'son of a lion' in Hebrew, which you can see on the cuffs, and they're two sided so you can pick which ones you want to wear. They've turned out to be my good luck cufflinks so I wear them for special occasions."

10. Stanley Cup watch: "Some people have their rings from the Stanley Cup, but some of the staff received watches. If you look on the back it says 'Ari Levy.' No-body else has it."

ARI
LEVY

Ari Levy doesn't have much time on his hands. He's the co-CEO of Engaged Health Solutions, a team doctor for the Chicago Blackhawks, a husband and father to a 1-year-old daughter. So it's a good thing he wears a watch to keep him on track. In fact, Levy owns a handful of fine timepieces, plus a growing collection of cufflinks.

And while he claims to be more of a consumer than a connoisseur, his taste reflects sophistication far beyond his 33 years.

Born to an Israeli father and American mother, Levy was exposed to the glitzy world on Wabash Avenue as a young boy, thanks to his father's best friend, Israel Levy, a heavy hitter in Chicago's diamond district. "Men in [their] generation showed their affluence by wearing a Rolex and gold jewelry," Levy says. At 14, Levy received his own Movado, which had a classic leather strap and a flat face. "I was fascinated by the fact that something with such small parts could be handcrafted to run forever," he says.

Levy's obsession grew with the purchase of a limited-edition Gevri, a Swiss luxury brand, and then next, a Rothschild from Germany. "You'll see young guys all wearing Panerai and Baume & Mercier," he says, "but I like to spend time searching for something different." Levy trolls online sites such as *Watchxl.com*, compares notes with other collectors and relies on local jewelry boutique Marshall Pierce to get his finds appraised. In 2010, when the Blackhawks team received rings for winning the Stanley Cup, Levy was gifted with a more fitting piece: a custom Swiss watch engraved with his name.

When it comes to finding cufflinks, he's adopted a more laid-back approach. "They're much easier to buy on the fly," Levy says. But for the most part, each pair still tells a story. Take the set his brothers gave him five years ago, featuring a lion design in reference to his name (Ari is Hebrew for lion). Ask Levy what his dream piece of jewelry would be, and he'll say with a sigh "Jaeger-LeCoultre," the iconic — and incredibly pricey — Swiss brand. "But, until then, I've got a daughter I need to put through college." Who says you can't dream big?

