



No limits

ANY CUSTOM DESIGNER CAN CLAIM TO UPHOLD THE ULTIMATE STANDARDS OF QUALITY. MANY USE ONLY THE BEST GEMSTONES. LLYN STRELAU CAN CLAIM AN IMAGINATION THAT IS ONE IN-AMILLION
BY LOUISE CORNISH

Jewellery is the closest thing to the body, next to underwear - except jewellery is on display," says designer Llyn Strelau, commenting on the importance of quality in fine jewellery. His opinion is that it not only has to reflect the wearer's personality, it has to be flawless.

Strelau's attention to detail has not gone unnoticed. His designs have garnered 20 international and national design awards seven AGTA Spectrum Awards, six Canadian Jeweller Buyers' Choice awards, the International Pearl Association's Paragon Award, two Platinum Honors, the Citra Pearls Design award, the Alberta Jewellers' Association design competition award and a Beyond Tradition award (a special version of De Beers' Diamonds Today for Canada). He has also been a finalist in De Beers' Diamonds-International Awards.

His influence - or perhaps his insistence on working only with fellow perfectionists - extends to the designers who work for him, who have, between them, garnered six additional awards under his studio name, Jewels By Design.

Such recognition has extended Strelau's reputation beyond the city limits of Calgary, Alberta, his chosen headquarters. He has designed custom pieces for clients throughout Canada and the U.S., and from as far away as Dubai and Switzerland. No matter where they come from, JBD clients have one thing

in common - a taste for the unusual.

"For my own satisfaction, my jewellery must be wearable art," he says, but the client has to think so too. He favors working closely with each one, helping them select the gemstones and then creating a piece that reflects the client's personality. Strelau wants his designs to be wearable and memorable, and to tell a story. "My best pieces have soul, not just line, form and body," he says.

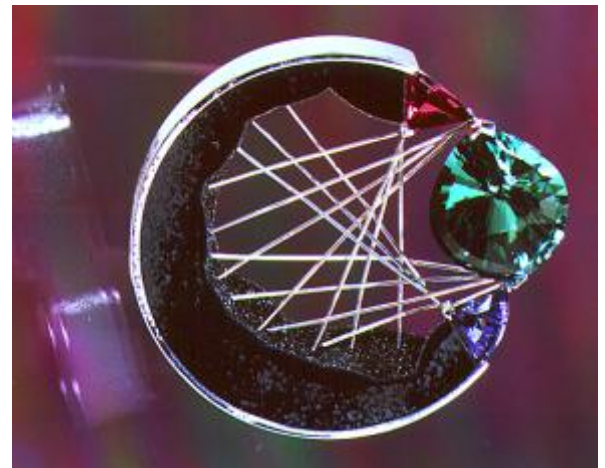
The inspiration for his predominantly gemstone-focused creations often originates with the gem itself. "When I discovered a collection of teardrop-shaped Chinese fresh water pearls, they reminded me of Byzantine church domes," he says. Inspired by their unusual shape, he envisioned a design and decided to purchase them. He then created the architectural brooch, **St. Eligius**, in the shape of a Byzantine cathedral. St. Eligius is the patron saint of goldsmiths. (See next page)

Whatever the inspiration, Strelau's designs are truly unlike any others. For one customer, he designed a brooch called **Time and Three Tales**, (see next page), with the client's birth stone,

an opal, as the centre stone. Almost more sculpture than brooch, the piece depicts a cat gazing through a gothic arched window with a view to a night sky. A mouse and a comet provide the other two "tales." The moon can be mechanically adjusted to appear in its different phases, and the stars that frame it are arranged in the form of Libra, the client's astrological sign.

These types of one-of-a-kind creations line the display cases in the JBD studio, and have earned Strelau a reputation for producing something truly original, every time.

OPENING NIGHT: INCORPORATING A 22 CT., FANCY CUT INDICOLITE TOURMALINE, FAN-CUT TANZANITE AND RHODOLITE GARNETS AND CARVED DRUSY BLACK ONYX. THE BROOCH WON A 1997 AGTA SPECTRUM AWARD. PHOTO BY JOHN PARRISH/AGTA.



ST. ELIGIUS: 18K YELLOW GOLD AND PLATINUM, NATURAL-COLOR PINNACLE-SHAPED CHINESE FRESHWATER PEARLS. WHEN IT IS FINISHED, ALL OF THE WINDOW OPENINGS WILL BE SET WITH FANCY COLORED DIAMONDS AND THE CHURCH WILL OPEN UP TO REVEAL FOUR RUSSIAN-MADE MICRO-MOSAIC ICONS.



FOUR MOSAICS TO BE MOUNTED INSIDE **ST. ELIGIUS**. CREATED IN THE STUDIO OF **THE VIKART GROUP** IN MOSCOW. (LEFT) THE **PANTOKRATOR** OR HEAD OF CHRIST FOR THE DOME. (RIGHT) A **TRIPTYCH**, DEPICTING THE **DEISIS**; CHRIST FLANKED BY HIS MOTHER MARY AND ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST. THE TRADITIONAL CENTRE OF THE **ICONOSTASIS** IN MOST ORTHODOX CHURCHES. THESE MOSAICS ARE MADE OF MINUTE **TESSERAE** CUT FROM NATURAL COLOUR RUSSIAN GEMSTONE MATERIALS WITH DELICATE GOLD WIRE ACCENTS. THERE ARE BETWEEN 300 AND 500 INDIVIDUAL **TESSERA** PER SQUARE CENTIMETRE. DOME IS APPROXIMATELY 15 X 20 MM, TRIPTYCH IS 25 X 40 MM.

(LEFT) **FLYING FREE:** 18K GOLD AND PLATINUM WITH A SPECULAR (RAINBOW) HEMATITE, 10 PEAR-SHAPED, MULTI-COLORED GARNETS AND 10 PRINCESS-CUT DIAMONDS. THE BROOCH, DESIGNED BY LLYN STRELAU, WON A 1995 SPECTRUM AWARD.

(RIGHT) **TIME AND THREE TALES:** CARVED BLACK DRUSY ONYX (HERMAN GRIMM, IDAR OBERSTEIN). FREEFORM BOULDER OPAL OF 3.5 CTS, 12 RUBIES, 12 BLUE SAPPHIRES, 14 EMERALDS A 6MM CABOCHON MOONSTONE, A 3MM FRESHWATER PEARL, EIGHT WHITE DIAMONDS, ONE NATURAL FANCY YELLOW DIAMOND IN 18K YELLOW AND WHITE GOLD AND PLATINUM. BEHIND MOONSTONE IS A DISK THAT ROTATES TO SHOW MOON PHASES.



His background may shed some light on his penchant for the outrageously unique. He collected stones from a young age, while growing up on his parent's farm in rural Saskatchewan, stashing away an old rhinestone here or broken earring there. His big break came when an uncle gave him some antique iron horseshoe nails. Strelau fashioned them into a series of pendants, which he sold to his friends.

Since then, Strelau has graduated to more precious materials - his favorite gemstones are fancy colored diamonds and pearls, and he works mainly in 18k gold and/or platinum. He has also been known, however, to work in unusual materials, such as titanium and niobium.

After travelling and working in Europe and studying at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, Strelau gradually built a career as a jewellery designer and eventually ended up at Jewels By Design in 1979. Five years later he bought the company.

While Strelau has developed it into a thriving, high-profile business, the fact remains that award-winning jewellery design is not the first thing most people associate with rough-and-tumble Calgary. The oilpatch, as Calgary is

known because of its roots as an oil town, can be an unpredictable market, especially for a luxury retailer. Calgary's economy is tied to the price of oil. When it dips, the effects are immediately palpable. Strelau weathers the cycles by mixing up his client list.

Older, established clients patronize him because of the individualized attention they get and his personalized approach to design. He devotes a great deal of time to educating customers about quality and design elements. Clients with the means to invest in expensive jewellery expect a certain level of quality and appreciate the confidence Strelau instills in them.

But Strelau believes the future of his business lies in the youth market, which is just beginning to discover his work. Younger clients generally want individual designs, and turn increasingly to designers like those at JBD, especially for wedding and engagement rings. One young couple requested Strelau incorporate a tiny cartoon cow in their rings - a copy of a drawing they used to send in cards to each other. Another couple, who owned a vineyard in California, asked for multicolored gold bands with bunches of grapes in the

design.

He has also expanded into other markets, including the U.S., but only in a limited way. Preferring to concentrate on custom pieces that he can control, he is reluctant to produce a line because he feels it will compromise the quality of his work. As a result, his expansion strategy has largely consisted of making one-off deals with other small retailers.

To spread the word about his work, Strelau sends out a newsletter. It is available at the showroom and is mailed to his customers and anyone who requests it. "It's not a sales flyer," he says. "I like the subtle approach of the newsletter. It serves as a reminder that we're still here."

He points out that the product knowledge customers gain from it is as important to him as it is to them. He wants them to know as much as possible about what they're buying. "Informed customers pay me to care," he says.

(LEFT) **SUNRISE AT THE OASIS:** RING WITH 1.77 CT. OVAL-CUT PINK SAPPHIRE AND TWO, PRINCESS-CUT BLUE SAPPHIRES OF .24 TCW. THE RING, DESIGNED BY JBD'S BAYOT HEER, WON A 1999 AGTA SPECTRUM AWARD.

(RIGHT) **AT ARM'S LENGTH:** BLACK SOUTH-SEA PEARL IN A DROP SHAPE, 100 WHITE AKOYA KESHI (SEED) PEARLS, TWO ROUND, FANCY, GREENISH-YELLOW, BRILLIANT-CUT DIAMONDS AND DRUSY QUARTZ CRYSTALS GROWING ON STIBNITE MATRIX. THE BROOCH, DESIGNED BY LLYN STRELAU, WON A 1999 SPECTRUM AWARD..

