



# IT'S A MAN'S WORLD

Releasing your male clients'  
'inner peacock'

By Llyn L. Strelau

**A**s a jewellery designer, I have fantasies of going back in time to be employed in the court of a Renaissance prince or the palace of an Egyptian pharaoh or a Maharajah. Those were the days when men of power both commissioned and wore a wealth of jewellery that confirmed their status and success and, I think, for many, the pure joy of wearing beautiful pieces. They were a time when men were the peacocks and the desire for adornment was strong.

I am not exactly sure what's happened since those glory days of men's jewellery. I expect early sumptuary laws forbidding ostentation, the rise of Puritanism, and more recently, contemporary male business suit homogeneity, may have had a large impact. In most of the modern era, the jewellery men wear (if they wear it at all) is, simply put, boring as hell!

### Spreading your wings

With the exceptions of subcultures of the 'hippie' era when flower children (male and female) wore beads and chains and the current trend of rap stars weighed down with masses of gold chains, skulls, and mammoth diamond (or more likely CZ) studs in their ears, men's jewellery is rather drab and predictable. Certainly there are a few anomalies in the entertainment business, such as the late Liberace and other Vegas, Hollywood, and pop star celebrities. Perhaps that notoriety has actually discouraged 'regular' men from indulging their 'inner peacock.'

The 'average' man today may wear a class ring, engineer's iron ring, or a wedding band. The adventurous



Photos courtesy Lynn L. Strelau



A mountain peak design may pique the interest of more adventurous male clients.

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“In something of a chicken-and-egg scenario, mass-marketed men’s jewellery presupposes we are not the adventurous type and, therefore, even gents who may be interested in more exciting adornment will have a lot of trouble finding something that catches their eye.”

Sterling silver ‘Thor’s Hammer’ pendant with star sapphire.



few may sport a discreet earring or even a simple bracelet. Others may have a single pair of cufflinks they bought from a tuxedo rental shop when they graduated school; if they have a lifestyle that includes black tie functions, they may even have a set of shirt studs, as well.

In something of a chicken-and-egg scenario, mass-marketed men’s jewellery presupposes we are not the adventurous type and, therefore, even gents who may be interested in more exciting adornment will have a lot of trouble finding something that catches their eye. There must be joint effort on the part of the jewellery industry to lead the charge, and the male consumer to demand the industry to rise to the challenge.

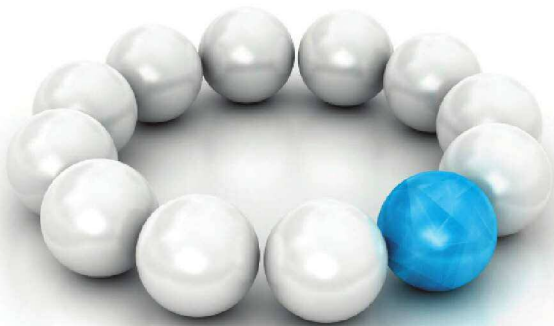
Recent years have seen a modest improvement in the situation. Young, fashionable men in their 20s and 30s are wearing a wider variety of neckwear, such as simple leather cords with pendants, chains in silver, or some of the newly popular alternative materials like stainless steel, titanium, rubber, and carbon fibre. Rings, cufflinks, and bracelets can be found made of these materials in addition to classic gold, silver, and platinum either alone or combined with tungsten carbide or space-age ceramics. The wedding band selection has expanded as well—some hold-outs still want no more than a simple narrow plain gold band, while we are seeing both traditional and alternative metals being used in interesting and creative ways.

Yet, fine jewellery is still a relative rarity in the men’s category. Watches are a notable exception—it seems that collecting fine (and often very valuable) timepieces is one activity considered manly enough that it is accepted. Of course, the stereotype of the masculine penchant for things mechanical has its influence and is a credit to the designers and makers of these intricate pieces of horological art. While some successful men spend thousands of dollars to add a watch to their collection

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(and likely own a similar array of automobiles and other 'toys for boys'), there are more modestly priced, though still well-designed, timepieces to allow up-and-coming gentlemen to change their watch to suit the occasion.

Other men who have gotten past that lone pair of cufflinks stage often have a large and varied collection—some precious, others sentimental, commemorative, amusing, or symbolic—to wear as an event demands. It is also easier now to purchase French cuff shirts in fashionable styles and colours that are not limited to the classic tuxedo shirt.

### **Separate the men from the boys**

What can jewellery designers do to encourage their male clients to purchase and wear more jewellery? In the first place, male designers could start by designing pieces for themselves and actually wearing them! I look back to my first American Gem Trade Association (AGTA) Spectrum Awards banquet some 20 years ago. Thrilled to be part of the designers being honoured for creative jewellery design, I naively assumed I would see my male colleagues attending this black tie function wearing interesting designer jewellery. I made myself a lapel pin and a new pair of cufflinks to wear. I was rather disappointed to see none of the other designers wore more than their wedding rings. Their spouse or partner might be wearing beautiful jewellery, but it was mostly a case of the 'shoemaker's children go barefoot.'

I take it as a positive sign that in more recent awards events, these same designers are now wearing pieces of their own making or purchased from others. Lapel pins, coloured gem or diamond rings, and bracelets and cufflinks are all on display.





Pieces incorporating interchangeable components can appeal to male clientele with a collection of cufflinks.



The Spectrum competition has had a 'Men's Wear' category for many years. A review of the entries and the winning pieces shows both conservative and innovative designs. However, this category still garners the fewest entries of them all, accounting for only eight to 10 per cent of the submissions made overall. Last year, there were only 24 in 'Men's Wear,' with twice as many in each of the 'Classical' and 'Bridal' categories, more than four times as many in 'Business/Day Wear,' and over six times as many in 'Evening Wear.' Is this a reflection of the industry's interest in creating exciting jewellery for the male of the species? Incidentally, if you are a designer interested in entering the Spectrum Awards, 'Men's Wear' is the best category in which to do so—you won't have much competition!

Another overlooked market for men's adornment is wedding rings and other jewellery for same-sex couples. Many male couples enjoy jewellery and are generally open to rings that stretch beyond the plain gold band their fathers and grandfather's favoured and there is double the opportunity for men's designs. Pieces in alternative materials and incorporating coloured gemstones in addition to or instead of diamonds are great options and offer a chance to push the creative envelope.

It is up to us as jewellery designers and jewellery store owners to step forward and both encourage and support the cause of fine jewellery for men.

Cufflinks are one of the most likely categories of men's jewellery to offer market growth potential. Aside from the

## bench tips



A bayonet clasp finding allows a basic link component that can be worn with a simple logo back and a variety of fronts or used with complementary decorative fronts and backs.



established tradition of wearing links, there is a growing trend for men in the business world to sport them. Even though the office dress code has relaxed somewhat from the days of three-piece suits, the fashion-savvy working man can build up a wardrobe.

### Bench pressing

So what does this have to do with bench work? Well, there's a lot to be said about creating a custom piece that is unique, fashionable, challenging to produce, and strikes the right chord with a demographic that appreciates the techie things in life. Some of my recent designs for men's jewellery include cufflinks with interchangeable components, appealing to that breed of man who has a collection of interesting links. Using German-made bayonet clasp findings, I designed a basic link component that can be worn with a simple logo back and a variety of fronts or used with complementary decorative fronts and backs.

The pictures on page 38 are links set with ancient Roman silver coins (depicting an emperor and an empress) and a collection of four different colours of South Sea pearls that can be worn in any combination. It is important to pay attention to the orientation of the cufflink in relation to the shirt cuff. The finding that goes through the buttonholes must match their direction (*i.e.* perpendicular to the length of the arm), while the decorative component typically looks best with the long axis (if there is one) running parallel with the sleeve.



Photo courtesy AGTA. Photo by John Parrish.



## bench tips

Photo courtesy AGTA. Photos by Robert Weidon.



'Green Arrow' cufflinks in white gold, with black jade, meteorite, round bezel-set tsavorite garnets, and bead-set black diamonds.

The 'Green Arrow' cufflinks in white gold seen above are set with black jade and meteorite, round bezel-set tsavorite garnets, and a sweep of bead-set black diamonds. The 2014 Spectrum Award-winning 'HEXactly' cufflinks seen on the bottom of page 40 are double-sided—one side with slices of emerald accented by yellow diamonds in yellow gold, while the reverse is white gold set with blue sapphire slices. The 'Orleans' links seen above them are set with German-carved druzy black agate fleur-de-lis accented with white gold and diamonds, and are complemented by carved moonstones for more dressy wear.

Entitled 'Kryptonite,' this lapel pin features 18-karat yellow gold wire straws holding a mineral specimen of chatoyant malachite set off by round brilliant diamonds.



Since cufflinks are subject to potential wear and tear, especially when worn on a regular basis, the metals and gemstones used should be durable. For dress wear, consider using materials that may be more delicate and decorative.

Men that wear suits can be persuaded to don lapel pins. These can be simple gold or silver designs or more elaborate, such as 'Kryptonite' seen above. Generally, lapel pins are longer than wide to sit comfortably on a gentleman's jacket. As such, they shouldn't be too bulky and the pin finding must be aligned to provide secure and balanced attachment.

“Other men who have gotten past that lone pair of cufflinks stage often have a large and varied collection — some precious, others sentimental, commemorative, amusing, or symbolic — to wear as an event demands.”



Offset bands offer a more interesting twist on the classic gold wedding ring. The amount of offset can be fitted to the actual shape of the client's hand.

Of course, wedding bands are the most common men's jewellery. Due to workplace restrictions, some gents cannot wear rings. For those who can and who are adventurous enough to wear more than a simple gold band, an offset design like the one seen above may be an option. In this set, the ladies' ring includes a line of pavé white diamonds, while the men's ring is embellished by a similar line of black diamonds. More simple is a plain gold offset band with sleek polished bevelled surfaces, while another has one half paved with tiny black

diamonds. Offset rings fit many hands better than rings that are straight across. Their shape makes it possible to wear a wider band without bumping the knuckle of the adjacent pinkie finger. This design detail is also a more efficient use of the joint of the finger where it is worn. However, even though clients typically find the ring very comfortable, some individuals (particularly engineers and accountants) simply prefer not to wear one—the offset design upsets their sense of 'balance.'

My request to my fellow jewellery designers and retailers is do your part to take advantage of the current trend, especially among your younger clientele, for interesting and varied jewellery for men. If we offer options beyond the traditional pedestrian selection that is likely sitting in your showcases, you will find there is a market to tap. Men are much more adventurous than they have ever been and their sense of personal style is strong. And don't forget to appeal to the women in their lives—they buy pieces for their partners, if only to 'justify' more jewellery for themselves in exchange! Men may not again be the peacocks of past centuries, but deep down that impulse still lives on. ✦



Llyn L. Strelau is the owner of *Jewels by Design*, a designer-goldsmith studio in Calgary established in 1984. His firm specializes in custom jewellery design for a local and international clientele. Strelau has received numerous design awards, including the American Gem Trade Association's (AGTA's) *Spectrum Awards* and *De Beers' Beyond Tradition—A Celebration of Canadian Craft*. His work has also been published in *Masters: Gemstones, Major Works* by Leading Jewelers. Strelau can be reached via e-mail at [designer@jewelsbydesign.com](mailto:designer@jewelsbydesign.com).