

ALEX GULKO CUSTOM JEWELRY

Alex Gulko could just as easily have been a metal smith from the eighteenth century, hammering works out of stone and metal in front of a fire, as one of a handful of custom jewelers in Ann Arbor today.

The Ukrainian-born émigré has hands well-muscled, familiar with the work of pouring molten metal into plaster molds, then carefully crafting the pieces into wearable art.

“Probably, it was a passion from childhood,” the diminutive jeweler says. “I think jewelry by itself represents the highest art.”

Gulko is a long way from Kiev, the city in the Ukraine where he lived and first learned to make jewelry under the tutelage of an 80-year-old jeweler and sculptor. Gulko is deferential when he speaks of his mentor, who taught the young apprentice how to work with stones and precious metals to create beautiful jewelry.

“He was pretty old,” Gulko says. His Ukrainian accent sits on the fringes of his

speech. “And normally his hand was shaking, but when he did jewelry, it was very firm. Amazing.”

Gulko’s approach to making jewelry is historical in a sense. Besides learning jewelry from his mentor-teacher, Gulko also studied by poring over books and wandering through museums to see how jewelry has been made through the ages.

“Some people, especially in the country I came from, thought jewelry was like a second art,” he says. “But fine jewelry is a combination of sculpture, of painting, of maybe literature, and even some music.”

Gulko’s designs bear the hallmarks of his historical perspective, but that’s not to say all his jewelry is traditional. His pieces range from the traditional, using platinum and diamonds, to what he calls Art Nouveau, Art Deco and his personal contemporary design, which uses geometric planes and open architectural elements.

He believes being able to design and craft pieces from all different perspectives makes him a better jeweler for his clients, enabling versatility to meet their myriad tastes.

“I take into account first of all their vision,” he says, explaining that he designs pieces based on cues from his clients. “That’s really important. I want them to like this jewelry.”

Often his clients convey specific ideas for a design. But if they don’t quite know what they want, Gulko will rely on mental images from the museum of jewelry he keeps in his head to craft the piece.

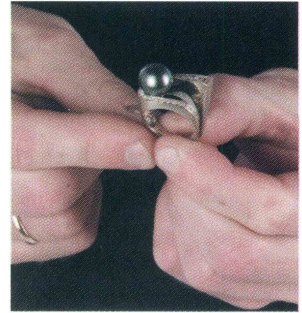
Jewelry is emotional, Gulko knows, and he tries to bring all the emotions to bear when crafting his pieces. He talks about the time a client and her husband came to pick up a ring he had made. When he opened the box to first show the piece, Gulko relates, “she started trembling and asked ‘Can I try it on?’”

The woman became so moved, he says, that she couldn’t put the ring on her finger. “She said, ‘This piece belongs in a museum, not to me.’”

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Alex Gulko’s passions for creating wearable art can be seen in the designs wrapped around the citrines and pink tourmalines and other stones he incorporates into his jewelry.

He remembers what a close friend once told him about the reason for his success. “She said I put so much energy and love into each piece, it’s transferred to my clients.” ✱



Alex Gulko