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Jonathan Lee Rutledge

Designer, by appointment, 847-738-4418;

www.rutledgejewelry.com

Jonathan Rutledge has always been happiest working with his hands. He began making wooden toys as a child, and as an adult he spent three and a half years repairing the sheet metal of F-16 jets in the air force and then saving lives as a local firefighter and paramedic. Off duty, he worked with the jeweler's tools that he used when he was studying fine arts in college. In 1997, following several successful high-end craft shows, Rutledge, now 35, abandoned his other professions to pursue his passion—fashioning high-karat gold into classically inspired jewelry.

"Sometimes I look at the clock and see the day is gone, but I still want to work," he says, perhaps in order to handcraft up to 450 dainty links into a textured 22-karat gold chain—dramatic enough on its own but spectacular when dangling a beautifully set pink tourmaline and a black pearl. Rutledge uses the techniques of the Etruscans, who dominated Italian culture in 500 B.C., and can spend up to 70 hours on a single piece, refining his designs with granulation and repoussé, patterns formed by hammering designs out from the reverse side.

Yellow gold is making a comeback, Rutledge says, replacing platinum, white gold, and even 14-karat gold, which is no longer the standard for fine jewelry. "The kind of work I do needs gold with fewer impurities to fuse properly," he explains. Rutledge likes to use pink stones—sapphires and tourmalines—for their harmonious look with the metal and also admires the subtle gleam of gold sapphires, which sparkle in the cuffs of his favorite blue

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Many of Rutledge's clients discovered him at the 2004 American Craft Exposition in Evanston, at trunk shows at Frances Heffernan in Winnetka, and through passionate word of mouth. In December, he will participate in the juried One of a Kind Show and Sale at the Merchandise Mart. Asked if he misses life in the firehouse, Rutledge professes an occasional longing for those bygone days. "Some of those guys," he says, "could cook like you wouldn't believe."



Tracey Mayer

The owner and designer of **Tracey Jewelry**; her pieces are available at Him, 1653 North Damen Avenue, and Macy's State Street; www.traceymayer.com

Even if you ran into her at one of her son's frequent soccer matches or taking in a game with her family at Wrigley Field or U.S. Cellular, Tracey Mayer would stand out, but not as a soccer mom. A prolific designer in 950 silver—a step above sterling in purity—her lean style and flashing rings give away her creative bent.

Five years ago, on a vacation from teaching fashion design classes at the Illinois Institute of Art, Mayer visited Goa, on the west coast of India. Mesmerized by the work of silversmiths there, she decided to launch a line of her own. Now 40, she is also influenced by other cultures and the natural world. Snowflakes, ancient coins, and woven weblike strands studded with semiprecious stones are incorporated into her earrings, bracelets, chunky rings, and cuff links. Indonesian artisans bring her drawings to life in silver and are currently working to perfect a sparkling peace sign. How does Mayer know when a design is finally finished? "If they send me the sample and I don't take it off for days because I love wearing it, that's a good sign," she says with a laugh.

"I want choices with my jewelry since my mood changes," Mayer adds, explaining the variety of her designs. "Sometimes I'm in the mood for ripped-up jeans and an old coin necklace, but at other times I want to put on a 70-carat ring that sparkles like crazy." Yet she is not a woman who lives by jewelry alone. A burgeoning style industry unto herself, Mayer has developed a line of animal-print pashminas made of cashmere so fine that it can be passed through the band of one of her cocktail rings, as well as a collection of long crocheted scarves with gold, bronze, and pewter threads. She continues to visit India yearly. "I need that connection," Mayer says, "and I find the underlying sense of peace in Asian countries very stimulating."

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