

AGTA news

American Gem Trade Association

Funny Lady Alex Meneses Gets Serious About AGTA Spectrum Awards™ Jewelry



Alex Meneses featured in Times Square in New York sparkling in AGTA Spectrum Winners.

As Isabela Santamaria on NBC's new comedy *Telenovela*, Alex Meneses plays an over-the-top Spanish-language soap opera diva, whose bitterness over being booted into the mother role of a younger leading lady is unleashed on her castmates. She's a hoot to play for the half-Mexican-American actress, especially when Isabela's antics are carried out in huge hair, 6-inch stilettos and a ladies-who-lunch wardrobe topped in showy jewelry.

But unlike her comedic character, the down-to-earth Meneses, first embraced by audiences as Teresa Morales on *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*, has a more refined eye for jewelry, making her an ideal celebrity spokeswoman for the 2016 AGTA Spectrum Awards™ Collection. Now in its 32nd year, the annual Spectrum competition, sponsored

by the American Gem Trade Association (AGTA), is North America's premier fine-jewelry design contest for natural colored gemstones and cultured pearls.

"I'm a pearl person," says the Chicago native, who earned American Comedy Award and ALMA Award nominations for her role as Robert Barone's luscious Italian love interest, Stefania Fogagnolo, on *Everybody Loves Raymond*, and starred opposite Greg Kinnear in *Auto Focus*, a New York Film Critics Circle Award winner. "I have a string of pearls that I've had forever and wear all the time. I even wore them as a teenager. I also had a double-strand necklace of gold pearls with a diamond clasp that I loved."

Perhaps that's why a pearl necklace caught the former model's eye during her photo shoot with the collection. Designed by Naomi Sarna of Naomi Sarna Designs, New York, the necklace, which won "Best Use of Pearls" in the competition, features cultured freshwater baroque pearls in warm hues of peach and pink, with a gold and diamond clasp and matching pendant.

Meneses was equally as enthralled with the rest of the collection, telling the AGTA how astonished she was by the beauty of the colored gemstones and the innovativeness of the designs. She gushed about another of Sarna's pieces—a necklace composed of turquoise-bead strands (814 ctw.) intermingled with 18K yellow gold and diamond rondelles—describing it as "face-brightening" and "feeling good to wear." She also mentioned the crescent-shaped pendant necklace created by William Travis Kukovich of William Travis Jewelry, Chapel Hill, N.C., saying it's "so beautiful" and something she'd "never seen before." Spotlighting a 4.74-carat brown diamond accented with rose-cut diamonds (.40 ctw.) set in oxidized silver and mixed gold, the piece won "Best Use of Silver and Color."

Also special to Meneses were the magnificent earrings created by Bella Campbell of Campbellian, Morristown, N.J. Composed of blue-green tourmalines (17.05 ctw.) and emeralds (4.14 ctw.) set in 18K pink gold, the "Best Use of Color" winner showcases Meneses' favorite gemstone colors: green and blue.

Of all the green and blue gemstones, emerald is the top choice for Meneses. She's such a fan, in fact, that her most memorable jewelry experience is buying herself a white gold ring set with a 12-carat emerald-cut Colombian Emerald, after thieves broke into her home and stole all of her jewels.

"Three years into my marriage, we were robbed," Meneses says. "They took all of my jewelry. The ring was a gift to myself [after the incident]. It was ginormous and fabulous, a favorite piece."

While Meneses' emerald ring could surely captivate from across the room, the *Friends*, *NCIS* and *Prison Break* alum prefers a little less flash in her everyday wardrobe. She opts to wear maybe a few rings, and almost certainly a watch. A men's Rolex with diamond accents and a leather strap is a favorite, as is a Harry Winston diamond timepiece. "It's like a dessert," she says.

But when it comes to black-tie affairs, Meneses has a more "anything goes" attitude about jewelry. Perhaps that comes from dressing up in mom's jewelry as a little girl, something Meneses' young daughter now does with hers.

"We couldn't afford expensive jewelry when I was young," Meneses recalls. "But my mother was a model in the '50s, a real fashionista. She loved fashion jewelry, and I loved dressing up in it."

As a TV, film and stage actress, the president and founder of her own production company, and a tireless philanthropist dedicated to such causes as United Hope for Animals and the Children's Hospital Los Angeles—for which she's been a board member for 11 years and raised millions of dollars—Meneses has plenty of opportunities now to play dress up in real life, and does so in jewelry appropriate for the occasion.

"I tend to wear black to gala events, which I usually accent with diamonds. That's dressy to me," Meneses says. "But the jewelry really depends on the event and the outfit. I just have fun with it."

For a woman who gives us so many laughs and brings joy to so many in need, we would expect nothing less. By Jerilynn Kraus

Featured in the photo: earring, Bella Campbell; necklace, Naomi Sarna; rings, Kim Hurlbert-Sarosi and Ricardo Basta; gown, Anon; photographer, Andrew Macpherson; producer and stylist, Tod Hallman for Ivy Eleven.

For further information regarding the AGTA Spectrum Awards™, contact Megan Whitmire at (800) 972-1162 or visit the AGTA website at www.agta.org.

The American Gem Trade Association is a not-for-profit Association serving the natural colored gemstone and cultured pearl industry since 1981. Headquartered in Dallas, Texas, The AGTA serves the industry as "The Authority in Color."