



AGTA Announces the 2016 Summer AGTA Spectrum Awards™ Judges

June 22, 2016, Dallas, Texas – The American Gem Trade Association (AGTA) is pleased to announce its panel of judges for the 2016 Summer AGTA Spectrum Awards™.

This year's judges are:

Diane Garmendia, Retailer, 33 Jewels at El Paseo

Gail Brett-Levine, Appraiser, National Association of Appraisers

Jay Mednikow, Retailer, J.H. Mednikow & Co., Inc.

Victor Velyan, Designer / Manufacturer, Victor-Christy Studios

Lew Wackler, Lapidary, Lew Wackler Gem Co.

The esteemed judges will bring their wealth of experience and knowledge to judge the AGTA Spectrum Awards™, the world-renown colored gemstone and cultured Pearl jewelry competition, along with the AGTA Cutting Edge Awards™, which showcases loose colored gemstones, artistic carvings, innovative faceting and objects of art. The 2016 Summer AGTA Spectrum Awards™ will take place in July.

“This is an exciting group of judges!” stated Douglas K. Hucker, AGTA CEO. “We have top experts in their fields, innovative retailers, design gurus and lapidary geniuses all represented this year!”

The AGTA Spectrum Awards™ is the world's premier colored gemstone and cultured Pearl jewelry design competition with categories in Bridal Wear sponsored by *The Knot*, Business Day Wear, Classical, Evening Wear and Men's Wear. AGTA Spectrum Awards™ also features the Platinum Honors™ sponsored by Platinum Guild International and the Gem DIVA Awards™ sponsored by the Womens Jewelry Association (WJA). The AGTA Cutting Edge Awards™ honor loose colored gemstones in everything from Classic Gemstones to one-of-a-kind Carvings, Pairs and Suites to Objects of Art. The competition is open to U.S. and Canadian designers and cutters.

Meet the 2016 Summer AGTA Spectrum Awards™ Judges:

Diane Garmendia, 33 Jewels at El Paseo



Diane Garmendia has always had a passion for art. Growing up in New Jersey, surrounded by a creative family, she cultivated a deep aesthetic, appreciation and understanding of art in many forms, and found herself constantly creating.

She traces her love of jewelry back to the age of 7, when her Grandfather, a retail jewelry store owner, summoned her to his side. He said, "Hold out your hands," and proceeded to pour a small velvet pouch of diamonds into her tiny hands. The smile has never left her face.

Her Grandfather's store closed when he passed; however she and her younger brother (who moved separately to California years later) went into jewelry; he as a bench jeweler, and Diane working for a fine jewelry store in Santa Barbara. It was at this store that she pursued her passion of "art on a small scale," meeting and learning from the modern masters of jewelry.

At the age of 35, her dream location became available and she struck out on her own. *33 Jewels at El Paseo* (Santa Barbara's only woman-owned fine jewelry store) has become a favorite of both locals and tourists from all over the world. Diane's love of jewelry, her easy-going style and the store's warm atmosphere are reflected in the business' motto, "Engaging Santa Barbara Since 2005."

Diane has a unique eye for a wide variety of styles and genres of jewelry, and has gained a following because of it. She frequently tells clients that they're lucky to own a piece of handmade jewelry. "If you think about it," she says, "every experience of the jewelry artist - everything they've been through and learned to that point - is reflected in that piece of work."

She is honored to be a part of the 2016 Summer AGTA Spectrum Awards™.

Gail Brett-Levine, National Association of Jewelry Appraisers

Gail Brett Levine, independent personal property appraiser, has been in the jewelry trade for 40 years. Initially starting as President of an antique shop in Alexandria, VA, Presidential Antiques Co., Inc., she specialized in antique, period and estate jewelry. She received her GG in residence (NY) in 1980 and currently serves on the Executive Council of the GIA Alumni Association as well as an officer of the Manhattan Chapter of the GIA Alumni since 1982. She has been a Board member and Treasurer of the American Society of Jewelry Historians, Board Advisor of the Gem-A USA, Past President of the Board of Directors of the International Society of Appraisers, 1996 - 1998, and served on its Board for five years.



Ms. Levine is President of Timeless, Inc. (1982 to present) specializing in insurance, estate, claims and donation appraisals of antique, estate and contemporary jewelry, precious metals and loose diamonds and colored stones and gem consulting. In 1994, she started her subscription based publication *Auction Market Resource for Gems and Jewelry* which is an in-depth report by qualified appraiser/gemologists of sales results of jewelry at auction which previews gem material. In 2005 Auction Market Resource ceased publications to become totally on the internet as www.AuctionMarketResource.com. It is currently recommended by most appraisal organizations.

In 2008, Ms. Levine revised, updated and expanded *Gem & Jewelry Appraising: Techniques of Professional Practice* written by Anna Miller, GG.

On March 2004, Ms. Levine accepted the position of Executive Director of The National Association of Jewelry Appraisers (NAJA) - the largest membership association specializing exclusively in gem and jewelry appraising and related appraisal issues.

Jay Mednikow, J.H. Mednikow & Co., Inc.



Jay Mednikow is CEO of his family's 125 year old jewelry business. The first generations of the Mednikow family moved from Russia to America in the late 1800s, opening stores along the Mississippi River, and in like-manner, Jay has expanded eastward from Memphis, adding stores in Atlanta and, most recently, Nashville.

Jay's adventurous entrepreneurial spirit and penchant for detailed analysis is evident both in his educational background and in the discerning eye with which he identifies and acquires exquisite diamonds and precious stones. As a student at Harvard, Jay was intrigued by statistical economics and published a dissertation on the DeBeers Cartel that can still be found in the Harvard Library. After college, Jay embarked on what would turn out to be a brief detour away from the jewelry business, pursuing a career in finance on Wall Street. It took only two short years for Jay to realize that the world of business and finance, far removed from the timeless beauty of jewels and the artistry of expertly-crafted jewelry, was not the path he wanted to follow. He obtained an MBA from Duke University, returned home to Memphis and began a generational transition that would grow the family business from one focused on traditional classic pieces to one filled with the world's finest high-end fashion jewelry from the world's finest designers.

Jay says that the pleasure in finding extraordinary gemstones and diamonds and discovering brilliant and talented jewelry designers who use the stones and precious metals to create beautiful jewelry are what make the jewelry business exciting. "Sometimes it just takes a detour to find where you are going: jewelry and design is my purpose and my passion."

Victor Velyan, Victor-Christy Studios

For over 20 years, Jewelry designer extraordinaire Victor Velyan has both influenced and inspired those in the jewelry industry. Not only does Velyan's strong work ethic and creativity leave an impression on everyone he meets, but it's also creating a whirlwind frenzy around the captivating jewelry in his latest line. Victor's work boasts careful attention to detail and makes for elegant, timeless pieces with an edgy twist.

Victor Velyan began his journey in the jewelry industry in 1984 as a diamond setter and 2 years later became a jeweler's apprentice. Over time and with uncompromised

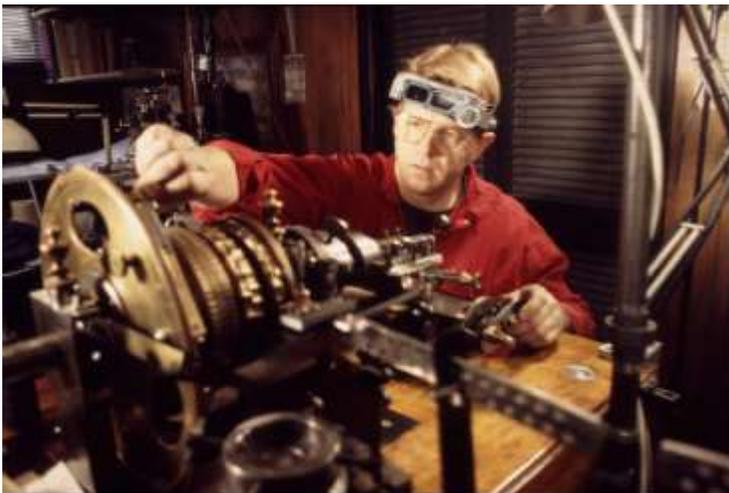


dedication, Velyan's knowledge of the industry grew, as did his desire to develop and share his vision with others. In 1995, with a decade of experience under his belt, Victor realized his dream by opening his manufacturing shop, Victor-Christy in Los Angeles, California. The studio allowed Velyan freedom and flexibility to produce pieces for some of the industry's most significant designers. Though his manufacturing and design for others proved to be undeniably successful, winning over 27 awards under other designers' names, his own creations were yet to be fully expressed.

One afternoon Victor found himself designing a cuff that *he* would want to wear; a true expression of himself. That day the collection was born. Inspired by the old Aragon world - Velyan's work is also influenced by architecture, music, nature, travel, unique cultures, history and fine art. He combines metals and conglomerations of various gemstones. Diamonds accent the work to make bold, vivacious statements. Victor is also inspired by his second home, Africa. He understands the continent, its people and is in tune with its nature - especially the animals. Victor studies them – sponsoring photographic safaris, something he's done since his early 20's. He swims with the hammerhead sharks every September in Mexico, because their freedom offers him a view into the world he can get from no other. Nature in all its grandeur is more than just a retreat for him - it is a necessity. Often times it's on horseback in the Santa Monica Mountains where he'll be found. He has no choice but to escape there. When pent-up too long, he literally begins pacing like a caged lion.

Victor Velyan's talent and vision, combined with his well-rounded knowledge of the jewelry industry, have placed him as a true innovator in today's fashion-inspired jewelry world.

Lew Wackler, Lew Wackler Gem Co.



Lew Wackler has reinvented himself time and time again in his 46 years in the jewelry and gem industry. He started a custom gold and silversmith shop in 1970 Denver, Colorado at the young age of 20. Thousands of items were carved and cast for his wholesale and retail customers. In the late 70's Lew moved to Durango, Colorado, continuing to make art jewelry and also began to design top end Native American jewelry for a Southwest Colorado trading post. This developed into becoming a traveling gem salesman, the main route being

between Sun Valley, Idaho and Santa Fe, New Mexico. Soon Lew began to specialize in investment grade Rubies and Sapphires, while traveling over 16 times to and from Asia. Starting in the late 80's Lew settled in Boulder, Colorado and turned the business focus to Fantasy cut gems. Here he married and had his son Alexander Wackler, who is now entering the gem business as well. Lew won one of the first AGTA Cutting Edge Awards™ with a first prize multiple technique gemstone. Then his life shifted once again when his research into the manufacturing techniques of famous jewelry houses such as Faberge resulted in him being hired by a Royal Baron as his head work master. Lew and his crew made Faberge style objects for over 10 years for exclusive carriage trade clients. Starting in 2002 he returned to concentrating on Fantasy cuts, art jewelry and also adding fine custom knife making to his studio work. Lew has decided to pass on his knowledge by teaching exclusive studio Lapidary classes. He takes great pride in his students, who have gone on to win over 100 AGTA Spectrum and Cutting Edge Awards™.

AGTA has announced that a portion of each Gem DIVA Award™ entry fee will be donated to the WJA's Cindy Edelstein Memorial Fund. The fund, which will be part of the WJA Foundation, will be earmarked for educational opportunities within the jewelry design and education communities.

The New York Drop-off for Spectrum entries is Tuesday, June 28th at the offices of Intercolor, 48 W. 48th St., Ste. 800, New York. For more information regarding 2016 Summer AGTA Spectrum Awards™, please contact Megan Whitmire at 800-972-1162.

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

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