

Get paid to design jewelry!

FabJob Guide to
**Become a
Jewelry
Designer**



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1. Introduction

For years you may have been saying to yourself, “I would love to be making jewelry for a living.” Well, congratulations! Here you are, embarking on the realization of your dream.

Jewelry design is a creative career offering diverse opportunities. A jewelry designer can work in close connection with the fashion world, or may identify more as a sculptor of wearable art.

You may aspire to work for a company designing jewelry for manufacture and high-volume distribution, or you may choose to work from a home studio designing custom pieces for individuals.

You may wish to work solely from your own inspiration, making and selling your work to galleries or boutiques, or taking your work on the road to craft shows near and far.

Though jewelry designers may not experience fame in the same way that apparel designers might, some such as Kenneth J. Lane, Robert Lee Morris and Judith Ripka have established themselves as well-known

names in the field. Others, whose names may not be as widely known, have developed a reputation within a particular niche.

Whether your goal is to develop a name for yourself in celebrity circles, to work behind the scenes for a big designer label, or to set yourself up in a studio designing one-of-a-kind pieces, this career offers the opportunity to make a living using your creativity.

A combination of hard work, determination and a driving passion are all required to bring your dream to life — choosing this book will get you off on the right foot.

1.1 About Designing Jewelry

Look around you: almost everyone is wearing some form of jewelry. All these people, all these body parts to adorn! This wide, wonderful world of ornament presents so many possibilities.

A watch, for example, is a piece of jewelry that satisfies a function. A wedding band is symbolic of a commitment. A pendant, such as a crucifix, may be worn as a symbol of an individual's belief, or in commemoration of a ritual. A locket is worn as memento. Jewelry may also be an heirloom, or a souvenir.

Some people change their jewelry as often as they change clothes — they approach jewelry as a fashion accessory. Others may wear a particular piece of jewelry to express how they feel, or to influence how they feel. Many believe certain stones or metals have curative properties that can affect emotional or physical health and well-being.

Jewelry can also assert a social position by declaring wealth and status. For some, the alteration of the body to accommodate the jewelry, such as with piercings, becomes part of a personal or social statement.

1.1.1 Jewelry Past to Present

Jewelry is nearly as old as civilization. In fact, according to a recent report by National Geographic, human beings may have been adorning themselves as far back as 75,000 years ago.

Garlands of flowers adorned heads and encircled necks, bracelets woven from grasses and reeds were wrapped around arms and legs, and strung-together shells, also used as currency, would all have preceded the working of metal.

In its early incarnations, jewelry held another important purpose: the spiritual. Amulets or charms were worn to invoke magic or spirits for protection, good health, fertility, and fortune, as well as to repel evil.

Over time, the purpose of jewelry evolved to marking occasions and rites of passage, to denoting social standing and declaring wealth (and as currency itself), and to being regarded purely as ornaments of beauty.

Modern museums are a rich source for research. There we can witness the evolution of jewelry in our society, and recognize how the designs of ancient ornament are not so far removed from the designs of modern jewelry. If you are interested in the history of jewelry, the website of the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, England maintains a list of websites related to the history of jewelry design, from the most ancient to the most contemporary. You can see the list at www.vam.ac.uk/collections/fashion/jewellery/index.html.

Today the market for handcrafted jewelry is everywhere, and crosses all population demographics. Jewelry appeals to girls and women of all ages. Men and boys wear and use certain accessories, and jewelry is a popular gift item, as well as an easy item for tourists to purchase and travel with.

1.1.2 What a Jewelry Designer Does

As a jewelry designer, what you do day-to-day will depend on whether you are employed by a company, or working for yourself; whether the jewelry is handmade by you or made by others according to your designs; whether the process requires basic hand tools or commercial manufacturing techniques; and whether the works are one-of-a-kind and destined for specific clients, or if they are produced in quantity.

Chapter 2 of this guide will give you detailed information on how to design jewelry and how you will spend your time in this career. As a

basic introduction you should know now that your daily activities may include:

- Using computer programs to create jewelry designs
- Communicating your designs to a modelmaker
- Ordering findings and beads from catalogs
- Meeting with manufacturers to discuss production practices
- Networking with other designers
- Staying up to date with fashion trends
- Meeting with clients to determine their interests and needs
- Visiting museums and other places for creative inspiration
- Sketching your design ideas
- Applying for grants
- Experimenting with new techniques
- Promoting yourself and your designs to potential clients
- Participating in tradeshow

Jewelry designers are able to choose where they wish to be on the scale of trends: as trend-makers, riding the waves of trends, or resisting trends. Even handmade jewelry is subject to trends, because the market is, for the most part, trend-driven.

Keep in mind that jewelry reflects lifestyle: where will your customers shop for the jewelry you make? At a farmer's market, craft mall, or through high-end galleries or Internet craft marketing sites?

Designers You Should Know

Some jewelry designers become well known for setting trends or changing the way the industry works or thrives. Here are a few examples, chosen to illustrate the range and variety that exists in jewelry design. These designers are, in many ways, worlds apart. Getting to know a bit

about each of them will help you get a sense of where you want to head with your own career as a jewelry designer.

Kenneth Jay Lane

Lane's career began in the art department at Vogue, and from there to designing shoes for Christian Dior, among others. In 1963, he made his first earring line to complement the bejeweled heels he had designed for Arnold Scaasi. The collection sold out at Saks Fifth Avenue on the first day it was released. He is known for the flash and glitz of his highly imaginative costume jewelry line, and for the Hollywood names and royalty who are devoted to his jewelry. Vintage KJL jewelry is now highly collectible and new lines are still being created.

- *KJL bio*
www.kennethjaylanegift.com/about.html

Paloma Picasso

Paloma Picasso is known for her exclusive designs for Tiffany. As the daughter of Pablo Picasso, her name has a built-in cachet. Her designs are simple graphic elements in bold shape and color.

- *Tiffany & Co.: Paloma Picasso*
www.tiffany.com/Shopping/Category.aspx?cid=288189&mcat=148206

Robert Lee Morris

Morris founded Sculpture to Wear in New York City in 1973, and in 1987, Artwear in SoHo, NYC. Artwear is considered by many to be pivotal in the development of the wearable-art jewelry movement in the U.S. Though he closed Artwear in the 1990s, his own gallery, The Robert Lee Morris Gallery, is still active on West Broadway in SoHo.

- *Robert Lee Morris*
www.robertleemorris.com/biography.php

Otto Künzli

For those with an interest in contemporary experimental works, Otto Künzli could be referred to as one of the fathers of modern conceptual

jewelry. A Swiss-trained goldsmith with flawless technical skills, his approach to jewelry is both playful and provocative, and challenges the traditional conventions of jewelry. He is presently a professor at the Munich Academy of Fine Art in Germany. He actively writes about jewelry, and curates jewelry exhibitions around the world.

- *Otto Künzli*

www.goethe.de/ins/au/pro/kuenzli/kuenzli2/pages/fxab.htm

Other Famous Names

Some of the most famous names in jewelry such as Tiffany, Van Cleef & Arpels, and Harry Winston are actually retailers, not jewelry designers. The jewelry they sell is actually the result of the creativity and skill of an ensemble of highly talented individuals, and not the creative work of the individual on the masthead.

Similarly, jewelry designs sold under designer names like Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, Jones NY, and other names known for their fashions are designed and manufactured by individual jewelry designers, not the fashion designers themselves.

Are You Suited to Jewelry Design?

Consider your answers to the following:

- Do you spend as much time searching for the right jewelry to accent an outfit as on the outfit itself?
- Are you highly detail-oriented?
- As a child, did you prefer sitting at a table doing crafts to playing outdoors?
- Do friends often ask your opinion on style?
- When looking at layouts in fashion magazines, do you focus on the accessories rather than the whole impression?
- Would your friends describe you as creative or inventive?
- Do you like to assemble things?

- Do you tend to take a project to completion? If you answered “yes” to some or all of the above questions, you are on the right track pursuing a career as a jewelry designer!

1.1.3 Benefits of the Career

Those who venture into this career are first and foremost motivated by the desire to be creative. They have experienced wearing the designs of others, marveled over fine detail, or delighted in the glitter of gems or the gleam of polished metal.

Wide Variety of Options

Within this field there are many career options and contexts in which to design and/or make jewelry. Your particular choices and goals, along with your temperament, will direct you. Your priorities may be to attain a certain level of income, or you may desire the freedom to structure your own time and follow your own creative path.

Some designers will pursue employment with a fashion jewelry company. A regular salary and involvement in the exciting world of fashion are the payoff for those who choose this route.

A craft jeweler both designs and makes the jewelry, usually in limited production runs, works independently, and sells the works in various venues from tradeshows to websites. The volume of work he or she is able to produce and his or her marketing ability determines this designer’s success.

The artist-jeweler may spend many years honing both design and technical skills. They work independently, showing works primarily through galleries, high-end craft shows and designing for private clients and collectors.

One of the great benefits of this career is the freedom you have to structure it to what is right for you.

Personal Satisfaction

The jewelers who I interviewed for this book, and in fact, nearly all those I have gotten to know in my more than 15 years in this creative

business, are all passionate about their need to create; it is as essential as breathing.

Individuals who direct their creative energy into a career are driven to do so by an inner passion. With the ebb and flow of creativity comes potential for change and evolution, something many jobs lack.

Each time you complete a project, you will have the satisfaction of having worked through a series of design challenges and techniques. You will continually be able to add to your roster of skills, and start new projects incorporating what you've learned. You will witness your own evolution as a designer.

Recognition

Another level of satisfaction comes from seeing your work actually being worn out in the world. The products of your imagination will have a positive effect on both wearers and viewers. Some will value the craftsmanship, others the design, or the way it complements their new outfit perfectly.

When you start to do shows, whether these are small open houses, trade or retail craft shows, people will check both you and your work out. Many will want to know more about your processes, your inspiration, and your background. You will find that they are not only interested in a nice piece of jewelry, but they also experience a thrill from connecting with the maker. As time passes, even if it is on a very small scale you will have fans who seek you out at shows.

Independence

So many people complain about their bosses that it is exciting to approach a career choice that allows you to realistically entertain the idea of not having one. Even if you choose to work for a large company, which can suit many designers just fine, you will have skills and creativity that you could thrive on independently were you to make that choice. That is truly empowering. While there are challenges in being self-employed, few of these are insurmountable if you call on the resources that are out there for you.

Earning Potential

It is likely that you will earn approximately \$40,000 annually as an established junior designer. The head designer for a large company may earn \$75,000 a year or more. An entry-level designer might expect to earn an annual salary of about \$28,000 at a better-known fashion jewelry company, while an entry-level bench jeweler might start out at around \$10 an hour (*source: www.communitycollege.net/jobs/creator.html*).

A self-employed jeweler's earnings are limited only by that individual's determination and understanding of their market. Generally a jeweler who devotes full days to design and who promotes the work reasonably well might expect sales of \$15,000-\$20,000 in the first year, with increases of 10-20% each year thereafter.

This figure is only a base: your design and marketing savvy, along with careful financial and business management could put you in a different league altogether. Be patient, and stick to what holds meaning for you.

1.2 Inside This Guide

The *FabJob Guide to Become a Jewelry Designer* has been created for you by an experienced and successful jewelry designer, with valuable help from others in the field. It will guide you through the various steps toward getting employment in this career or starting your own business as a jewelry designer.

The tips that have been passed along by professionals and experts in this field will give you insider information, and will set you on your path to pursuing a career in this creative field.

Chapter 2 (*How to Design Jewelry*) discusses types of jewelry; the wide variety of materials you can anticipate working with; the design process; and the tools and processes by which jewelry is made, both by hand and in manufacturing.

Chapter 3 (*Preparing for Your Career*) will take you through the various options of how to develop your skills as a designer. We'll guide you through addressing your strengths as well as acknowledging the gaps

in your present knowledge and experience, and direct you to resources to help fill in these gaps as well as to harness your existing skills.

Chapter 4 (*Getting Hired*) answers the question of how to get a job with the skills you develop. Tips on finding your ideal employer, how to prepare for an interview and what you can expect to be paid, both starting out and as you become established, are all topics of discussion in this chapter.

Chapter 5 (*Starting Your Own Business*) speaks to those pursuing this creative career for the freedom and independence it offers. Setting up your workspace, choosing a business name, and getting the right price for your work — these and other essential topics are all covered in order to give you the confidence to follow through.

Chapter 6 (*Selling Your Designs*) addresses the reality that you are not only in this to design the jewelry, but you also need to sell the fruits of your labor. Creating good marketing materials and finding the appropriate venues to promote and sell your work to your target market are all covered here.

Chapter 7 rounds things out with success stories about individuals who, like you, envisioned a life of being creative and went for it!

When you are finished with this guide you will know what steps to take next and where to go from there. By applying what you learn here, it's just a matter of time before you'll be where you want to be... in an exciting career as a jewelry designer!