

jewelry | ZARIG BAGHDADLIAN: DESIGNS USING FINE GEMS

Did you wear a lot of different jewelry growing up? Being a second-generation jeweler, I was always surrounded by exquisite jewelry, but my parents never wanted to spoil me. Instead, I would save up my allowance to buy myself a small piece of diamond jewelry; in my opinion, that made the piece that much more special to wear. One of my favorite pieces I always wear is a Lorraine Schwartz evil eye bracelet she gifted me when I was 16 years old. It's my good luck charm!

Did you always want to be a jewelry designer, and if not, what did you think you would be? Yes and no. I always knew I wanted to work in the jewelry world, but I had no idea what specifically I wanted to do. When I started working, and if I wanted to treat myself to fine jewelry, I would be frustrated that a lot of fine jewelry brands wouldn't tell you details about the gems — for example, the diamond's quality. It's like buying a luxurious dress but not knowing if it's made of silk or polyester. That's when I started making my own jewelry, first for myself, and then I slowly grew it into a brand.

Where did you learn how to become a jewelry designer? I earned my Bachelor of Arts degree in business administration in fashion merchandising from LIM College, followed by a graduate gemologist degree from the Gemological Institute of America. I worked for my family's diamond business for a couple of years in midtown Manhattan, after which I earned my master's degree in art law and business from Christie's, accredited through the University of Glasgow. Living in London for those two years during my graduate studies was a crucial time for me. I was surrounded by jewelry lovers like myself, feeding each other's curiosity and knowledge. After I moved back, that's when I decided to grow my jewelry designs into a brand.

What type of jewelry do you specialize in or enjoy creating the most? Fine jewelry. I use a similar diamond quality to the major jewelry brands, like Tiffany's and Cartier. I also found myself doing bridal pieces as several of my friends wanted me to make their engagement rings. I love the process of picking out the perfect diamond and creating a special custom ring for my brides and grooms.

Where does inspiration for the design start, and what comes next in the process? My gratitude walks in my neighborhood in northern New Jersey play a big role in my creative process. Nature and travel are the two most important things that inspire me. Living in the Garden State, I am always in awe of the colorful flowers blooming in the spring, and seeing the vivid colors of the leaves changing in the fall. During the lockdown, I was inspired to create something that was as colorful as the flowers I was seeing every day, which is when I designed my Cascade Gemstone and Diamond Earrings. We all need something that's joyful and celebratory after the year and a half we've had!



NATURAL BEAUTY Baghdadian says that seeing colorful flowers during lockdown brightened her days, and inspired her to create her Cascade Gemstone and Diamond Earrings.

What makes this art and not a craft, or is it both? It's definitely both. All of my jewels are handcrafted. Working with an incredibly skilled jeweler is just as important as the artistic design of the jewelry.

What materials are your favorite to work with, and why? Diamonds. For a diamond to be created, four things need to be present: carbon, high pressure, high temperature, and, of course, the passage of a lot of time. The fact that something so beautiful comes from so much pressure is poetic to me. Kind of like the human journey — the more adversity you face and rise above, the more you shine, very much like a diamond. Aside from diamonds, I also enjoy working with colored sapphires and one-of-a-kind gemstones, like opals.

What makes your pieces different from other designers? My jewelry designs have a one-of-a-kind playful twist, but are also timeless, meant to be passed down for generations. Also, I create jewelry pieces with an awareness of the importance of high-quality diamonds, gemstones and fine craftsmanship.

How often and where do you typically travel? I travel quite often for work and for leisure to regroup and recharge. London and Greece have become like second homes to me, traveling there a couple of times a year. I just spent a month of my summer in Greece, mostly on Mykonos island, and once again it's proved to be a place where I'm continuously inspired.

Does traveling influence your work? Absolutely! My Elevate collection is wholly inspired by my trip to Egypt in 2018. Going to the national museum in Tahrir Square and seeing King Tut in person was a magical moment. I was inspired by the ancient Egyptian symbol, the Eye of Horus, which represents protection and intuitiveness — so much so that I decided it had to be on my Elevate pendant. I never leave my house without wearing it.

Where do you see your career in the next five years? I hope to split my time between London and New York, creating jewelry pieces that make every woman feel happy, confident and elevated.

Anything else you think our readers should know about you? I come from a warm Armenian culture, and it seeps through in every aspect of my life. >

A woman with brown hair pulled back, wearing a vibrant, multi-colored floral and leopard print dress, sits on a dark grey couch. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. In front of her is an open orange jewelry box containing several smaller boxes. She is holding a necklace and a ring. Behind her, a shelf holds several magazines, including 'self service' and 'P MAGAZINE No7 (PRIMAL)'.

ZARIG BAGHDADLIAN

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AGE: 31

GREW UP IN LEONIA AND RESIDES IN CLIFFSIDE PARK

BUSINESS STARTED: ZARIG JEWELS