

The Washington Post

Jewelry designer makes inroads with upscale retailers

By Danielle Douglas
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From her basement studio in Vienna, Dina Mackney started designing semiprecious gemstone necklaces and rings eight years ago, following an encounter with a local boutique owner who was taken with a piece she created for herself. Mackney has since caught the attention of the likes of Nordstrom and Saks Jandel, where her collections are sold. And starting this month, the venerable luxury retailer Neiman Marcus will carry Dina Mackney Designs at select stores.

Mackney has designed a handful of pieces exclusively for Neiman, which will feature her work at stores in Atlanta; Chicago; Charlotte; Newport Beach, Calif.; and Plano, Tex. The partnership, she said, is the culmination of years of building her brands, shopping around her wares at trunk shows, boutiques and jewelry expos.

A single mother of two, Mackney gradually expanded her company, allowing her time for her young children and to learn the ins and outs of the jewelry business. Coming up with collections was natural for the Parsons School of Design alum, but managing the inventory and production proved more challenging. After meeting Nordstrom executives at a wholesale show four years ago, Mackney began selling her jewelry at 20 of their stores nationwide. That demand necessitated a streamlined supply chain and the eventual relocation of her home studio.

"We were shipping out Nordstrom product from the house, but it just became too overwhelming," Mackney said. "I found an aquamarine earring in the playroom and thought, 'Okay, that's enough.' "

Despite moving into a larger space in Reston, Mackney has kept her overhead to a minimum, with few full-time employees on staff. Much of the work, such as the ordering and processing, is sourced out. Working with topaz, amethyst or garnet stones can be pricey, but Mackney said she has developed good relationships with a handful of dealers around the world. She doesn't design with a price in mind, but is conscience of costs in sourcing material.

"They may have an absolutely beautiful pink tourmaline, but if one strand of it is \$500, I doubt I'm going to be able sell that," Mackney said.

A Dina Mackney necklace can run from \$300 to \$1,000. At a place like Neiman's, where similar jewelry can top \$5,000, that lofty price tag could be considered reasonable. "Because my line is well priced, it has given me an opportunity to grow in areas where we otherwise might not have," Mackney

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said. Last year, however, was tough as a number of jewelry retailers slowed their purchases. Orders, she noted, have picked up this year, as buyers become more optimistic about the rebound of the market.

"Wholesale [jewelry] buyers are beginning to restock their inventory now that retail demand appears to be solidifying," said retail analyst Kenneth Gassman of the Jewelry Industry Research Institute. "While total jewelry sales were down only 5 percent peak-to-valley in the recession, the further back you go in the pipeline, the more sales were down. Why? Retailers did not restock. So wholesalers did not restock."

Domestic jewelry sales have been on an upward trajectory this year, with total revenue rising 8.2 percent year over year to \$4.1 billion in July, according to the most recent data from the Commerce Department. Gassman forecasts that the industry is poised to post record sales of \$63 billion, up 7 percent from last year, based on current market trends.

At Neiman, designer jewelry has been among the strongest performing merchandise segments this year, contributing a significant portion to the \$250 million in total revenue the company earned in August, a 3.9 percent increase from the same period a year ago.

To promote Mackney's line, Neiman will host seven events around the country, including a trunk show at Mazza Gallerie on Nov. 6. While the Neiman's in Friendship Heights will not initially carry the line, Mackney said the retailer may consider adding the line there in the future.

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BY JULIA ERWIN—THE WASHINGTON POST

SHOPPER

Around Town

A night out on the town seems especially apropos when one is decked head to toe in local designerware, such as . . .

A necklace by Dina Mackney. The Vienna resident started her jewelry business two years ago after someone spotted a necklace she was wearing and asked to buy it. She works with semiprecious gemstones, sterling silver and 14- and 18-karat gold.

A handcrafted bag. Rockville's Jennifer Baum Lagdameo's Ananas purses come in fresh colors like lime, mango, coral and papaya. She works directly with Filipino weavers to source top-quality abaca that has been hand-dyed to create her bags.

Jewelry by Lisa Fisher of Potomac. She creates one-of-a-kind pieces from semiprecious gemstones, handmade glass and antique beads for her Fisher Dezins line.

Bea's Birthday clothing. Siobhan McInerney-Landford,

Dina Mackney Designs orange chalcedony necklace, \$199 at Sassanova, 1641 Wisconsin Ave. NW. Bea's Birthday pink baby-doll top, \$139 at Nana, 1534 U St. NW. Terre Peck T-strap poufs, \$275 at Sassanova and Betsy Fisher, 1224 Connecticut Ave. NW. Aleksander Meza's onyx necklace with sterling silver clasp, \$180 at Habitat, 1510 U St. NW. Fisher Dezins's "cleavage catcher" necklace (\$75) and matching bracelet (\$45) made from silver metal wire, at fisherdezins@aol.com. Ananas berry wristlet bag with sequin beading (\$70) and canary resort bag with roses (\$50), at Daisy, 1814 Adams Mill Rd. NW, and Daisy Too, 4940 St. Elmo Ave., Bethesda.

Terre Peck shoes. Peck, of Fairfax Station, began her career in the fashion business more than 20 years ago working on New York's Seventh Avenue for a dress designer. When she became a commercial banker, she found it difficult to find business shoes that weren't stodgy. So she quit her job to pursue her dream. Her shoes are manufactured in Tuscany.

Aleksander Meza jewelry. Meza is an architect by trade and owner of the home accents and jewelry shop Habitat



BY KILIA EWAN—THE WASHINGTON POST

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*The Ring of Truth:
Size Does Matter*

Cocktail rings are not just for cocktails. They are also for beer and soda. "They are now being worn to the office, out shopping, to dress up jeans and to dinner parties. There are no rules," says Amanda Berg, spokeswoman for the Jewelry Information Center.

The cocktail ring—a super-size version of the traditional trinket—is best as the center of attention. It can be too small—but not too big. Other pieces of jewelry can be worn with the cocktail ring, but they should be minimal—say, a small pair of diamond studs and a simple bangle. Cocktail rings should never be worn on the same hand as other rings. It makes them feel unworthy.

It is the "ultimate accessory for spring and summer," Berg says. "Because they come in so many bright colors, they instantly liven up any outfit."

From top: Dina Mackney Designs white topaz ring set in sterling silver (\$250), cushion-cut amethyst set in gold (\$580) and pink cabochon-cut tourmaline set in sterling silver (\$600) at Sassanova, 1641 Wisconsin Ave. NW. Banana Republic mother-of-pearl striped ring (\$45) and enamel flower ring (\$38) at bananarepublic.com. Karin Jacobson Design synthetic purple sapphire "atmosphere" (\$276) and "lunar" rings (\$241.50) at All About Jane, 2839 Clarendon Blvd., Arlington. Blue topaz ring in white gold (\$299) and citrine and diamond ring in yellow gold (\$629) at diamonds.com.

—Janelle Erlichman