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For Prestige Jewelers*



By Caroline Stanley

El Paso, TX—“Everything is about design,” says Susan Eisen, chief design officer of **Susan Eisen Fine Jewelry & Watches**. “Creating departments in your store, advertising, marketing, display and, of course, jewelry; it all comes back to design.”

Eisen began her design career with a background in art and art metals, then moved into jewelry. For her customers, she’s done a wide variety of designs. “We do some design from scratch, some we modify, some we redesign, some jewelry we add to. Design is a big, huge word. It covers a lot of territory.”

It didn’t take Eisen long to learn to design for her local market; she’s a native of El Paso. “I started as a jewelry artist, making extravagant things in metal that were very ultra modern,” she said. “Once I found I was not in that kind of market, I tailored my designs to fit.” Eisen also puts in her time at the bench, creating the jewelry design and then working hand-in-hand with the [bench] jeweler from start to finish.

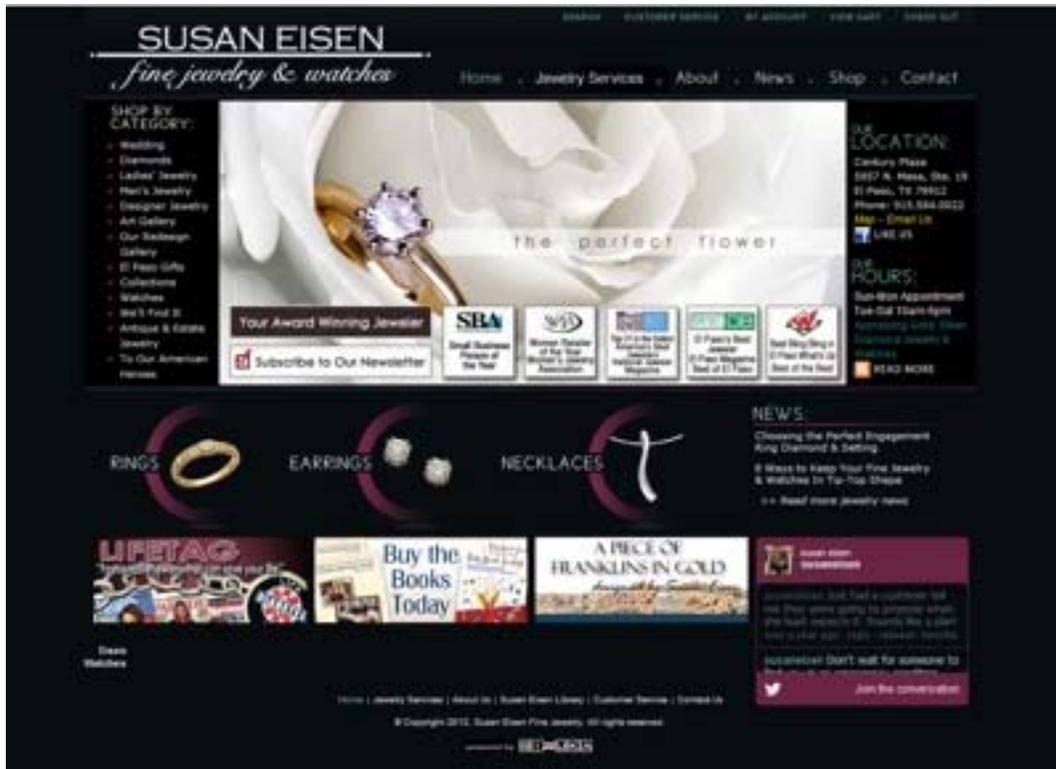
Along with jewelry of her own design, Eisen carries mostly designer jewelry, designer watch and jewelry a little out of the ordinary. “We love Lagos, Scott Kay along with a lot of smaller designers working in silver and gold,” said Eisen. “We carry American crafts and American craft jewelry that’s made of crystal and pewter, plastic, glass, leather – unusual materials. We’re really more of an art gallery-ish type of jewelry store.”



Two views of the interior of Susan Eisen Fine Jewelry & Watches.

Spreading the word. Eisen reaches her customers in a number of ways, some of them rather unexpected. The usual ways include TV, radio, billboard, print (although not as much as in previous years) and online. The unusual ways include a weekly radio show (Eisen has run a 30-minute show on a local radio station for the past four years) and sponsoring exhibits on jewelry at the El Paso Museum of Art. Eisen's design talents shine here as well. "We don't use an outside advertising agency," she explains. "I do creative directing with technical assistance to create our ad campaigns."

And then there's her website, which is chock full of designs along with out of the ordinary links. Visitors can watch informative video featuring Eisen, view collections she's designed (jewelry series for American Heros plus a new collection coming for this election year), and see a picture of diamond-studded boots she designed for the 100th anniversary of famed bootmaker Tony Lama. The company's factory is local; they contacted Eisen for the design. The site also allows users to access submission forms for lost and found jewelry.



“We do as much as we can from the website: contact customers, take questions, offer online browsing and buying. Our website isn’t as much about how much money comes in; it’s about having a presence online. We’ve had merchandise online for almost four years and it’s an investment that’s absolutely paid off. It’s like having another store, not physical one, but it has same requirements as having another location. Buying, selling, pricing, advertising, hiring people to manage it and keeping fresh merchandise coming in. We have three people that help maintain it, all with different expertise. It’s hard to find one person to do everything. I run my business based on finding the skills that people excel in; I don’t expect people to be a jack or jacqueline of all trades,” said Eisen candidly.

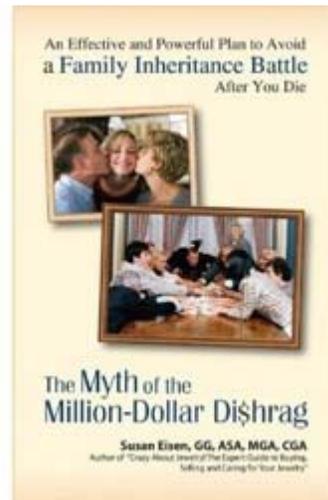
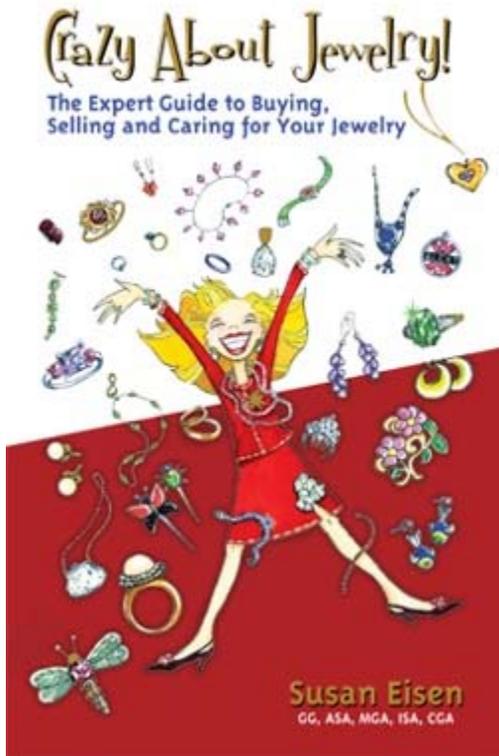
And the lost and found jewelry? The submission forms for lost and found jewelry get a lot of traffic from all over the country, according to Eisen.

“Unfortunately, there’s more lost than found,” she said. “It’s very interesting hearing the stories; customers often share why jewelry has so much sentimental value.” Is she able to match up the lost and the found?

“Hadn’t happened yet,” said Eisen, who is hoping it will happen while she’s there to match it up.

Eisen manages her business with a staff and consultants. “I believe in hiring consultants for everything,” she says. “In my 32 years as a jeweler, I’ve had consultants for marketing, advertising, Internet, public relations, everything really, and they have helped quite a bit. I work many hours and I have lots of good help,” says Eisen. “Every day is a challenge and a labor of love. It’s never boring. I always have more on my plate than what I have time for.”

Eisen spends some portion of her day designing, generally for customers, and the rest working as chief operating officer of her businesses, not all of which are jewelry. Eisen also is a published author of two books, *Crazy About Jewelry! The Expert Guide to Buying, Selling and Caring for Your Jewelry*, her first; and *The Myth of the Million-Dollar Dishrag, An Effective and Powerful Plan to Avoid a Family Inheritance Battle After You Die*, her second. It may not be a jewelry book per se, but it has a powerful jewelry connection.



Susan Eisen: jeweler, designer, radio personality, and also an accomplished author.

"It's about avoiding inheritance battles," says Eisen. The dishrag story tells of "a well-to-do family where the parents had all their ducks in a row for estate planning. The family followed the parent's wishes until they realized they all wanted the dishrag the mother had done the dinner dishes with each evening, which she had inherited from her mother. The son said, 'I'm the executor, I'll keep it,' but the siblings didn't agree. It became a huge fight, costing millions of dollars in legal fees. The family never spoke again."

Eisen says this isn't uncommon; she hears lots of stories. "We ask everyone who comes in if they have written down who will inherit their jewelry. Often we'll hear of something in the family brewing that can be fixed; things that can get bigger when you don't deal with them," she said. "Everyone has a story. Especially with second marriage issues; they can be very big."

If Eisen sounds busy, it's because she is. Her ideas often turn into businesses and sometimes trademarks; she's registered 11 trademarks and one patent in the last 15 years or so. Currently, she's working on "A Piece of the Franklins in Gold" collection where each piece contains a gold casting of an original rock from the Franklin Mountains in El Paso, formed a billion years ago. Her title of Chief Design Offers seems quite appropriate.

"I may have undiagnosed ADD," laughs Eisen. "I have always been this way and am blessed with lots of energy."