

MJSA CUSTOM JEWELER

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INSIGHTS INTO DESIGNING AND MARKETING CUSTOMIZED JEWELRY

TIPS FROM THE TRENCHES

Q: When a customer brings you a sketch for a jewelry piece that just isn't going to fly for aesthetic or mechanical reasons, what strategies do you use to turn that idea into a feasible project?

Timothy Green and Jo Haemer (Timothy W. Green, Portland, Oregon): Sigh. The worst are architects, greiks, and engineers. They come



in with computer drawings done to the micro-millimeter that look good on paper but won't work in real life. We take the position of authority and expertise when discussing such designs, but we always try to do so with humor so the client doesn't feel threatened. We'll say, "Wow. This is quite the drawing. I'm really glad you know just what you want. This makes my job easier. However, you do understand that we'll have to put this through a time-warped continuum and shoot it into another universe to make it work in real life."

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TO THE RESCUE

*Subcontractors can save a project—
if you know how to best work with them*

Good subcontractors can be of tremendous value to custom jewelers, enabling them to focus on their proficiencies and source out jobs that aren't a fit. "Maybe you're adept at sizing, repairs, repping, and resetting and you sub-out the eight-hour custom jobs, [or] are good at long projects and do not want to be bothered with repairs," says Gary Wieskopf, president of Jewel-Craft Inc. in Erlanger, Kentucky. "Either way, contractors can free up time."

But to get the most value, jewelers must know how to work with subcontractors—how to communicate needs, deliver materials promptly and with clear direction, and develop good working relationships. Starting on page 6, you'll find tips on how to do just that for three commonly requested services: CAD/CAM, casting, and stone setting. "It's all about strong communications and relationships," says Matt Fellous of Golden Sun Manufacturing in Plains, Montana. "With these tips in hand, you'll be much better prepared to achieve just that."

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Turning Ideas into Reality

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We then gently explain what will work mechanically and aesthetically, taking them through the jewelry-making process. Sometimes we'll do a drawing to illustrate our point, and we go into as much detail as necessary, explaining stone setting and stone security, metallurgy, and long-term wear issues. Our clients tend to be well-educated folks; they are a curious lot and enjoy the tech talk very much. The more they know, the more they appreciate the work we do.

Justin Singh (Abbey Jewelry Studio, Placentia, California): When a client brings in a sketch, I want to understand why and how he or she came up with it. I ask about what inspired the client to create the sketch and find out the most important design elements in it. If the design has a mechanical flaw—such

as a piece that goes from thick to thin to thick again—I explain why it won't cast right and, even if hand fabricated, will not wear for long.

I also ask if the client feels the person receiving the piece will understand the design. If there is any doubt and I know in my heart that the sketch is not truly expressing what the client wants to share, I offer suggestions, always working within the original concept. My goal is to help my client create a piece of art that is his or her own, not my version of it.

Susan Eisen (Susan Eisen Fine Jewelry and Watches, El Paso, Texas): Whenever a client brings me a sketch, I break it down and look at the various elements—the settings, the size/weight in relation to the body, the overall aesthetic. Then I find pieces in my inventory that feature similar elements and show them to

TIPS FROM THE TRENCHES



the client. It's much easier for clients to visualize a custom design when they can view physical pieces of jewelry that feature similar components.

If I am not convinced it will be a beautiful piece and represent my skills as a jewelry artist, I may turn down the request. I'm not a robot; I'm a designer who has to make something that I will be proud to show the world. ♦