The Enchanting Jewelry of Wendy Gell

Published by Melinda Lewis on May 23, 2014

Wendy Gell, whose jewelry designs were seen on the wrists of the "who's who," during the wild-style of the '80s, has had an extraordinary career that most in the fashion industry can only imagine. Her pieces graced the covers of Vogue, famous movie stars, and her technique was copied by many who wished to emulate her creative style.



Jewelry Designer Wendy Gell

In 1976, as a taxi driver while trying to think of a birthday gift for a friend, Wendy came up with the concept of her now famous "Wristie." It was at that moment that her future career as a respected jewelry designer was born. The need to come up with a glitzy gift would later turn into a multi-million dollar contemporary jewelry business.



Wendy Gell Wristie Courtesy of Melinda Lewis

Her jewelry has a very distinctive style. It is bold, whimsical, and glamorous. As a jewelry designer, Wendy leaves no surface unadorned; each piece is a complete encrustation of jewels and other materials. The covering of all surfaces is analogous to creating a painting with jewels that she successfully achieves through her medium. The materials she uses form not only textural depth, but a visual delight. As a contemporary designer, Wendy not only uses present-day materials such as rhinestones, pearls, and beads, she incorporates old findings into the work. It is not unlikely to find Indian carvings, netsukes and Eisenberg pins from the '30s and '40s as a center focal point in the designs.

Her designs are greatly sought after in the collector's market and her past clients include Cindy Crawford, Claudia Schiffer, Isabella Rossilini, Judy Collins, and Cher. Wendy Gell's jewelry can also be found in the private collections of Elton John (she designed sunglasses for him), Hillary Clinton, the late Andy Warhol, Elizabeth Taylor and Princess Diana.



*Wendy Gell **Wristies** and Pins*

Wendy's first true exposure came after Vogue magazine wrote of her artistry in 1982. The magazine featured a multi page spread of the up and coming designer's creations which showcased Isabella Rossilini wearing two highly-adorned cuffs, which were favorably received by the public and fashion press. In 1986, Wendy appeared as a featured guest on *the Oprah Winfrey Show*, as Oprah's favorite jewelry designer. The appearance came just one week before Oprah's show went national.

Early in her career, Wendy began designing for fashion notables such as Oscar de la Renta and Bill Blass. Following the runway success of her designs, she began to design for numerous fashion houses. Later in 1987, she designed shoe clips for the couture designer Charles Jourdan, as well as create a seven foot Christmas tree for the store's famous window design.

By 1990, Wendy Gell had 45 employees, and her business was tripling each year. Her off of Fifth Avenue workroom, staffed by skilled jewelry makers and young people just out of art school, produced Wendy's jewelry collection of one-of-a-kind Wristies, and more than 1,000 different earring designs.

Disney and The Gell Success Story



Wendy Gell Minnie Mouse Pin For Disney Courtesy of Melinda Lewis

Approached in 1986 at a trade show by a Disney representative to become a licensee, Wendy soon signed a million dollar agreement with Disney. Her cartoon-based line debuted in 1987 at Saks Fifth Avenue in a Wendy Gell Disney Boutique and also sold at Nordstroms, Disney stores, and the Disney theme park.

The items she designed included the 1989 Wizard of Oz characters, created in celebration of the film's 50th anniversary. Among the many designs she produced, the line included hand-painted and pavé-set Swarovski crystal pieces, and sterling silver tin man. Along with the jewelry, Wendy designed scarves with Disney characters in sophisticated floral motifs.

In addition to the first Disney contract for her famous Mickey Mouse and other characters, Disney Enterprises Inc. later contracted with Wendy to design the accessories for the movie, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. Steven Spielberg himself ordered a 12-piece set of champagne glasses decorated with the characters for a special dinner party. The line sold out. Ironically, in 1999, Wendy herself was searching for the collectible Jessica Rabbit brooch for her personal collection. Today, the Jessica Rabbit pin is a rare collectible.

Later, in 1995, when The Napier Co. obtained licensee privileges to manufacture jewelry product, Wendy was hired by the company as a consultant to design Disney themed jewelry, including Mickey, Minnie, Pluto and other Disney characters.



Wendy Gell Hand-screened Disney Scarf

In the early 2000s, Wendy enjoyed the stimulating life of an artist, and made a name for herself through paintings that capture the spirit of the beloved canine. Her Chagall and Matisse-style paintings, whimsically and magically project the inner soul of the animal that seems to speak a message of deep connection between the artist and subject. This work is a far cry from the fast pace glitz of the 1980s, yet so Wendy.

Today, Wendy teaches her jewelry techniques at OLLI at Southern Oregon University and the Ashland Art Center. Her students range from teenagers to women in their 70s and 80s. Always, there is a waiting list for her classes.

Wendy is also painting and making jeweled mosaics of late. She and her fiancé Larry Koskela plan to open a Judaic website (Mezuzart.com) in 2014 featuring the Mezuzahs and Hamsas in her Judaic line. Wendy has also been writing a book about her life in New York working in fashion and rock music in the 1970s and 1980s with a working title of *A Portrait in Rhinestones*.

Wendy continues to sell her jewelry and other creations on eBay, Etsy and her website www.wendygell.com. She will also be conducting a jewelry class at CJCI Convention 2014. For more details about Wendy's class "Have Glue Gun Will Travel!" click **here**.