

By Appointment Only

Alfredo J. Molina's jewelry stores may be only 27 years old, but this perfectionist calls on 380 years of family history to create legendary pieces of art.

By Christine Aebischer

When Alfredo J. Molina first opened his jewelry store in 1987 in Phoenix, Arizona, he had no merchandise, no employees and a negative net worth. What he did have, though, was a skill that he had been honing since childhood, and a family legacy of fine jewelry craftsmanship that dated back hundreds of years. That, coupled with his passion for the finest gems and dedication to providing incomparable service, proved to be enough. Today, Molina is one of the nation's most prestigious jewelers, is able to secure some of the world's rarest gems, and is chairman of The Molina Group, which includes jewelry boutiques throughout the country.

"When faced with difficult tasks, we have a choice to make," says Molina. "We can be fearful or we can believe." Molina's confidence in himself and his abilities to both create and obtain some of the world's most luxurious pieces of jewelry has established his stores and his reputation as nothing short of legendary. Molina and his team of master craftsmen create truly stunning pieces of jewelry from the finest materials, using Old World techniques alongside state-of-the-art equipment. The end results are one-of-a-kind and boast world-class quality of craftsmanship.

In order to maintain this quality, Molina finds that rejection is key. "I reject over 90 percent of the gems we receive, only keeping the best," he says. "Many times, we recut the gems we do buy to improve their quality." By not settling for anything less than breathtaking items, Molina has created a name for himself in the jewelry industry. Arizona Business Magazine has named Molina Fine Jewelers the No. 1 jeweler in Arizona for 18 consecutive years, and this exceptional reputation al-

lows him access to some of the world's most magnificent gems, such as the Archduke Joseph Diamond.

The world's 12th largest perfect white diamond, the Archduke Joseph Diamond is one of the most amazing gems Molina has ever owned, he says. From the ancient Golconda mines in India, this cushion-cut diamond weighs an immense 76.02 carats and is classified by the Gemological Institute of America as D color and internally flawless, the highest possible quality rating. Molina sold the stone in 2012 for nearly \$21.5 million, well above what was expected.

Discretion is another hallmark of Molina's success. He purposefully divulges little on the innermost workings of his trade, so as not to spoil the experience of entering one of his stores and seeing the gems firsthand. The salon of Molina Fine Jewelers is by appointment only, ensuring privacy and personalized attention. And, Molina even travels to clients who can't make it to the salon themselves. "We are in the people business," says Molina. "Jewelry is about emotions and how



What piece of jewelry can a person never go wrong with?

“Diamond stud earrings are a staple in any wardrobe. These can be worn in almost any setting and will last a lifetime.”

(Molina just unveiled a new collection of diamond studs for Black, Starr & Frost.)

people feel. We need to identify other people’s needs and earn their trust.”

From an early age, Molina knew that he would work in the jewelry industry. His family has been in the business since 1634 — originally starting as silversmiths in Milan, Italy — and Molina learned the craft from a young age. “The Molina family tradition was that the oldest grandson learned the craft of fine jewelry manufacturing, starting as a bench apprentice,” shares Molina. “I learned from my grandfather, who was from the old school, where you never completed a task in a manner that met his approval.”

Molina began his career at the age of 8

when he started his apprenticeship with his grandfather. Before creating one-of-a-kind pieces from the finest materials and most stunning gems, Molina worked with pennies, rolling them flat and learning how to work the metal. Copper, explains Molina, has similar malleability properties as gold, making pennies the ideal canvas to practice engraving, shaping, sawing and bead setting. After two years of this practice, Molina was allowed to work with real gold, and this is when he truly fell in love with the trade.

Given a bin full of granulated gold, Molina recalls scooping it in his hands and letting it slip through his fingers, mesmerized. “At 10

years old, I was hooked. Without even knowing it, I had found my lifelong calling,” he says.

Since the success of Molina Fine Jewelers in Arizona, Molina has expanded to New York and has also acquired Black, Starr & Frost in Newport Beach, California, America’s first jeweler (established in 1810). Molina oversees all of his company’s projects from start to finish, and personally inspects each piece before it leaves the design studio to ensure that it possesses the Molina qualities. “We only use the finest materials, we don’t cut corners, and everything that leaves the Molina Design Studio must be up to our world-class standards in order to bear the Molina name,” states Molina.



What are some trends that you’re seeing right now?

“In the past, trends were very easy to see. Now, people’s tastes are so eclectic it’s tough to point out specific trends. Right now, I am seeing a lot of bold colors and geometric shapes.”

What makes a piece of jewelry truly stunning?

“Almost anyone can make jewelry. What makes jewelry really stand out are amazing gems, superior quality, and one-of-a-kind designs.”

