

For Women, Every Day

An Interview with Jeri Cohen,
Jeri Cohen Fine Jewelry



EDITORS' NOTE For more than 20 years, Texas-born Jeri Cohen has owned and operated Jeri Cohen Fine Jewelry. Prior to opening her own boutique, Cohen trained as a classical violinist, studied singing, and received her MBA in music therapy from New York University. After starting a family, she embarked on the jewelry industry as a hobby with friends, which ultimately led to a thriving business. On the board of several major philanthropic organizations, Cohen regularly donates jewelry to auctions and events, including Russell Simmons's "Art For Life East Hampton" annual gala, the City of Hope, Island Harvest, Morry's Camp, and the Diamond Empowerment Fund.



Jeri Cohen

COMPANY BRIEF The Jeri Cohen Fine Jewelry (www.jericohenjewelry.com) collection features wearable and versatile jewelry tailored for the modern-day woman on the move. Specializing in loose diamonds, diamond jewelry, and other precious stones, Cohen has gained fame over the years for her beautifully crafted engagement rings. She works with only the best artisanal jewelers in New York, one of her many delightful secrets. Cohen's signature Butterfly Collection has made appearances in several New York magazines, and her gems are often adorned by celebrities, including Ivanka Trump, Molly Simms, Penélope Cruz, Sharon Osbourne, and Jennifer Lopez. The boutique is located at Trump Plaza on the Upper East Side of Manhattan.



Where is the Jeri Cohen Fine Jewelry brand positioned?

The brand is excellently positioned. We put a lot of time and effort into crafting and maintaining our brand awareness so that the image we project is one of exclusivity, beauty, and, of course, affordability. We have established terrific relationships with our vendors and our advertising outlets such as *Town & Country*, *New York Magazine* and the *New York Times*. It's important to us that our message get delivered in the manner in which our

highly sophisticated clientele expect.

Is wearability an important part of your designs?

My personal belief is that one should invest in pieces that are versatile – pieces that can be worn during the day, but also to a dinner out on the town. It isn't practical to buy a piece that one will wear only once or twice a year. Where is the fun in that?

Are you happy with the range of product you're offering?

I am a jewelry junkie. I just love jewelry. Sometimes I joke that I have more inventory than Tiffany. If somebody comes in here for a necklace, I can show a great selection in a \$4,000 price range, and then I can show five or six in a \$100,000 price range. The amount of jewelry I offer is astounding, and the quality is immaculate, no matter the price point.

Do you target a broad market or more of a niche segment?

Mostly a broad market, but because of where my salon is located, on Manhattan's Upper East Side, my clients tend to be neighborhood people, career professionals who want only the best product and the best value. I want people to come in and feel welcome in my store, not antagonized or nervous. You wouldn't believe how many people are intimidated by our storefront because our windows are so beautiful where we have some major pieces that I like to show off. And then they come in, and they see that it's casual, comfortable, and a lot of fun to shop or browse here. I created a perfect little environment – my two little pugs come to work with me every day, and a glass of wine is never far away. My prices run the gamut from inexpensive to hundreds of thousands of dollars. What can I say? It's a big city out there, but I absolutely treat every customer as a friend.

How personal is the jewelry business in terms of dealing with clients and your highly subjective product?

The jewelry business is extremely personal. It is definitely one of the reasons why I so love it. When people are spending a lot of money on a piece of jewelry, it really comes down to trust. They need to know they can trust me and my staff, and we work very hard to earn and then keep that trust. Clients need to feel that every concern and every whim they have is being addressed and cared for. I take that very seriously. It's part of what makes my business so successful. When new customers come in, I love to sit and chat with them over jewelry. That way I can get to know them a little bit and understand what excites them and what they are looking for. Only then can I really help them choose the perfect piece. I give my customers a lot of room at first, let them look around, see what piques their interest. And then if they want some help, we are there to offer our advice, steer them in the right direction. I really insist on a personal stamp of approval on every piece that leaves my store.

How engaged have you become in philanthropy?

I think we give to about 75 charities. I always give the hottest, newest piece to charity. I'll actually buy brand-new pieces of jewelry thinking that I'm going to give them to the New York Botanical Garden or that they would be good for the American Cancer Society. Occasionally it even crosses into bad business territory, but it can't always be about making money at this point. If I can give back, what greater thing could I possibly want in my lifetime? I would love to be remembered for my philanthropy and my big heart rather than for how much money I have in the bank.

When you started, did you know that you'd be successful?

Actually, I had no idea. It was just something that I needed to do. I dreamed about running my own business for years, and yet it was never and will never be about money. There was no business plan at first. In fact I was terrified of being out with the public. I am actually a very shy person. It was about validating a feeling that I had something valuable to offer. It was about being enthusiastic about something I love. If you can share that with people, then you're the luckiest person in the world. ●

Jeri Cohen pink hoop earrings (left); wooden cuffs and earrings with 18k yellow gold, coral, turquoise, pearl, and citrine (top)