



Bob Mednikow with his 1955 Alpine Sunbeam, which he purchased in 1955 when he was serving as an officer in Europe (right); J.H. Mednikow diamond rings (above); a rendering of Mednikow's new store that will be opening in Nashville (below)

## Growing Mednikow

An Interview with Robert M. Mednikow, Chairman Emeritus, J.H. Mednikow & Co.



**EDITORS' NOTE** Bob Mednikow received his B.S.B.A. from the University of Missouri and his O.P.M. from Harvard Business School before joining his family's business, Mednikow Jewelers.

**COMPANY BRIEF** Since 1891, generations of Southerners have celebrated life's most important occasions with Mednikow ([mednikow.com](http://mednikow.com)) with locations in Memphis, Atlanta, and Nashville.

### Will you talk about the vision in creating the company and how it has evolved?

I'm the fourth generation of Mednikows in the jewelry business. It started in Russia – Mednikows were all jewelers or musicians.

I went to military school and graduated from college. I spent eight years in the military, and I have a very structured and disciplined background as a result. I spent two of those years in Germany and traveled all over Europe looking at fine jewelry stores, mostly in Switzerland. I came home to my parents' typical mom-and-pop jewelry business, and I wanted to have one of the fine stores of America like those I saw in Europe, and I still do.

Soon after I came back, I got married. My wife finished college and came in to help us with the family business – she was a marvelous asset and still is.

We started putting in the very fine lines of jewelry. When my wife and I were on our honeymoon, we approached Patek Philippe and asked them to have us as their agent in Memphis.

We met with Mr. Henri Stern, the head of Patek Philippe, in Geneva, toured the factory, and had lunch and drinks with him later. That's how we became the agent for Patek Philippe in 1961.

It was a big step for us because, armed with a Patek Philippe agency, I started adding additional lines to our store. I remodeled the store as well. I had taken pictures of jewelry stores in Europe, and we designed a store like those, which is superb.

I now had a beautiful store in downtown Memphis selling fine jewelry, but the suburbs were booming, and I felt the need to move eastward with our customer base. I found a location in East Memphis and signed a lease to move our store there because I believed that's where the future was. My father didn't want to move the store because we had been downtown since 1891, but I knew it would not survive.

Eventually, I bought a building down the street from the East Memphis location I was leasing. I went back to the same architect who did our building downtown, and we remodeled this new building along very fine lines, and it's where we are to this day, 40 years later.

In the meantime, I went back to business school and got an additional degree at Harvard Business School and learned how to run a business more efficiently.

we would not do that, and we closed the store and could not find another location.

We have two employees there that are marvelous people, and we kept them on our payroll for three years until we found another location in Atlanta. It sounds very charitable, but both of them produced enough business to cover their salaries. We didn't have a huge profit, but we didn't have a loss keeping them, and we didn't want them to go work for someone else.



My son worked on Wall Street for two years and then decided to return to the family business. He worked with me for two years and decided to get his M.B.A. and then came back to the business. We have worked together ever since.

### Will you touch on your family dynamic and the issues related to a family business?

My son is academic and very bright, and my daughter is more social. She wanted to come into the business, but we were worried that would be too many family members involved in the business. That was our catalyst for opening our store in Atlanta in Phipps Plaza, which is arguably the nicest mall in Atlanta.

We were very successful there with a 10-year lease and even expanded the store. However, when the mall figured out that our little store was producing a lot more revenue than they anticipated, they wanted to double our rent. We said

We subsequently found another location in Atlanta, and that is where we are now.

Fast forward, we recognized that Memphis was not growing at the same rate as Nashville and the rest of the state, so we decided to open a store in Nashville. My son and I drove all over the city and could not find an available location that we liked.

Finally, in trying to make something work, we found a hole-in-the-ground where construction had been halted because of neighborhood complaints. By luck, we inquired the same day that the neighborhood injunction had been resolved, and we were able to lease a space in the heart of Green Hills in Nashville. In the meantime, we bought a small jeweler who was in the process of running a going-out-of-business sale, so we could operate in a temporary space until our new grand store opens when construction is completed in February 2018. ●