

Love is in the Earth

Go from African rubies to yellow beryl gemstones with award-winning jewelry designer Judith Ripka.

JEANNE FERRIS



The mystery of the transmutation of common metals into shiny gold has its origins in antiquity. The formula has always created a quandary and a challenge for the pursuer of this elusive elixir. There is however, a modern day alchemist—New York-born and -raised, international award-winning jewelry designer, Judith Ripka—who has captured love from the earth with her own secret alloy.

Ripka launched her first 18-karat gold collection in 1977, and has since garnered prestigious awards along the way, including the De Beer's Award for Outstanding Jewelry in 1982, Leading Women Entrepreneurs of the World in 2000 and official jewelry designer for Olympus Fashion Week N.Y. She and was chosen for the official gift basket for both the Screen Actor's Guild Awards and the 76th Annual Academy Awards in 2004—to name just a few accolades.

Her mineral kingdom of conflict-free semi and precious gemstones and metals has manifested into five stores nationally, retaining a presence in Neiman Marcus, along with other fine retailers nationally and across the pond.

Not one to rest on her laurels, Ripka has also successfully raised a family, which now includes five young granddaughters who seem to be following grandma's high heels in her childhood love for all that glitters. Their bejeweled presence gives testimony to one of Ripka's mottos: You are never too young to wear Judith Ripka.



"Jewelry should...be as much of daily fashion as the rest of the wardrobe." -Judith Ripka

"One of my pet peeves is when jewelry sits in a safe and is trotted out only on special occasions," Ripka said. "I believe jewelry should be worn and enjoyed every day, from day into evening, from black tie to blue jeans and everything in

between. Jewelry should form a cohesive statement about the style of the wearer and be as much of daily fashion as the rest of the wardrobe.”

The young, the mature, the rich, the comfortable, the professional and the famous—women and men—have embraced her collections on the red carpet and beyond. Oscar-nominated Kate Hudson and actresses Naomi Watts, Kelly Preston and other luminaries have been photographed with Ripka collectibles on their ears, fingers, necks and wrists. Linda Korey, a close friend of Ripka, has also been an avid collector of her jewelry.

“Because of her distinctive styling and signature features, my earliest pieces work beautifully with the current designs,” Korey said. “Over the years, I have built a collection that I truly love to wear every day.”





Currently, she is designing an amber collection, which was inspired by the Amber room in the Hermitage Museum on a recent trip to St. Petersburg, Russia.

The heirloom quality of Ripka's collection has endured, and pieces like the iconic 1977 PIA Cuff remain an essential part of her collection. Despite metal variations, the core design remains constant. The secret to her designs is that she doesn't focus on trends but timelessness—"classic with a twist," according to Ripka.

Nor does she focus on regrets. "I am fortunate that my past is filled with joy, laughter and the happiest of times, but I have had some bumps along the way as well," Ripka recalled. "Whatever your past has been, in business and in life, your sights should be set on the future. My mother had an expression which [has] resonated throughout my entire career: 'You can look back, but don't stare.' While I am mindful of my mistakes and failures, I don't fixate on them but rather, I use them as a springboard to become even better."

Positivism resounds throughout Ripka's corporation and invokes unwavering loyalty from Alice Aquilino, an employee of 14 years.

"Judith has always treated her staff like family," Aquilino said. "Her warmth, generosity and creativity make this a nurturing environment and she encourages growth. Maybe that's why the majority of her team has been here for years."

Ripka's answer to the question of when will she slow down reflects her work ethic and vivacity: "Why would I ever want to do that?" Currently, she is designing an amber collection, which was inspired by the Amber Room in the Hermitage Museum on a recent trip to St. Petersburg, Russia.

And when is too much jewelry...too much?

"Too much is never enough," Ripka replied. "A bold cocktail ring during the day lends flair to a tweed jacket and is just as appropriate in a conference room as it is on the dance floor. One of my personal favorites—and the most popular ring in our collection—has a large colored center stone, like cabochon rose quartz, surrounded by white diamonds and pink sapphires. Why save something like that for after dark?"

Besides her preoccupation from African rubies to yellow Beryl gemstones, Ripka sits on many boards and steering committees such as the Rita Hayworth Gala in support of the Alzheimer's Association. Also in charity partnership with Dress for Success Worldwide, Ripka has raised significant funds for the organization as well as public awareness.

With all of these responsibilities, does Ripka have one guilty pleasure?

"Judge Judy," she admitted. "She is a friend and I love her sassiness. I try to watch her as often as possible, and my favorite movie is 'To Catch a Thief'... It has everything: romance, mystery, intrigue...and fabulous jewelry."