

LOREN

From page 1

near downtown Fort Myers.

This week, Loren and his staff will be working on a \$2.5 million Fancy Intense pink carat diamond, a treasure brought to him by a client from Beverly Hills. The diamond will be delivered by a Brinks security guard who, Loren said, will stand over his shoulder and watch as he repairs the stone, then take it away as soon as it's finished. The rock will then be shipped to a Saudi Arabian prince.



Mark Loren

"This is not normally the clientele we work with," he said, adding that the heart of his business is the relationship he has with his clients, especially local ones, unexpected ones, or anyone who comes to his doors.

"One of the things I'm a firm believer in is keeping business local," he said. "Although we have the capability of working on very expensive pieces, most of our pieces range from \$1,000 to \$5,000. If I had a staff member who made the mistake of prejudging a customer on the way they look, they wouldn't last long."

One recent customer, for example, arrived in muddy overalls. He had just flown in by helicopter to purchase a special piece for his wife.

For another local couple, Loren designed an American flag ring for the husband, a World War II veteran in his 80s, who is also one of Loren's fishing and hunting buddies.

"That's one of the areas where work relationships have spilled over with social relationships," he said.

Those relationships sometimes bring unusual gems to light, Loren said, when



PHOTO EVAN WILLIAMS

Inside Mark Loren Designs

clients clean out their jewelry chests and bring him their finds for inspection. One client brought him a 100-carat aquamarine, a gem closely related to the emerald. It had been fashioned, Loren said, by none other than "the Picasso of Gem Cutters," Bernard Munsteiner.

"She thought it was some junky topaz, but it was a \$70,000 to \$80,000 stone," he said. "She got tears in her eyes. Her husband had recently passed away and she was going through the vault. She's now considering what she wants to do with it."

Loren was formerly a watchmaker, and before that an apprentice in a goldsmith studio and an art student. He cites his high school art teacher, Terry Young, as one of his earliest influences.

"Mark came in as a junior," recalled Young, who is now retired and lives in Chicago, near where Loren grew up. "He was really into jewelry. He was into the technical aspects of getting the finest finish, learning how to do all the technical things required: wax carving, casting in

silver, in pewter, in gold. And he impressed me in picking up the technical ability so quickly that by the time he was a senior, he already had the technique down, and he was flawless. So we concentrated on his artistic development.

"He'd be in at lunch hour and stay after school and do special casting. He was so dedicated and exciting to work with.

"He bled me dry, I'll tell you that. He was a challenge."

Another influence is the local internationally famous pop-artist Robert Rauschenberg, Loren said, who taught him to have a more "global perspective," and a style that connects "art" to "design."

"Art is very in the moment," he said. "A brief moment that becomes infinite. Design is more consciously done."

He also noted that the playful, smart Macintosh computer and sleek, modern Bang & Olufsen telephones have been design inspirations.

"How did they come up with that?" he wonders about those technological artworks. "Was it artistic interpretation or design?"

Some of Loren's accolades include three National Platinum Design Awards and five AGTA Spectrum awards.

"That's kind of like the Oscars in the jewelry design business," he explained.

He has also designed specific pieces for auctions, charities and fundraisers such as Wine Fest, the Rotary Club, his daughter's school (Edison Park), the Children's Advocacy Center, and the Bobby Nichols Charity Golf Classic.

One recent piece designed for the local Arts For Acts gallery in downtown Fort Myers, seemed the product of some of Loren's wide-ranging influences.

"We built this hot rod computer and a piece of jewelry that controls it," he said. "When you walk up to the computer it turns it on."

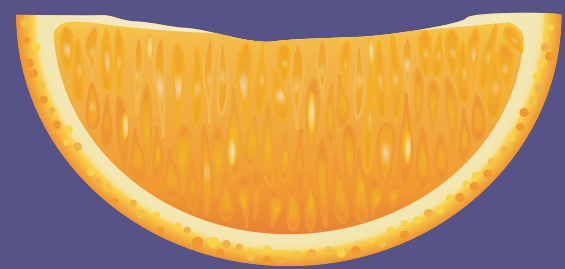
Television personality Joan Rivers, who hosted the event at Arts For Acts, wore the jewelry, and Robert Rauschenberg bought it after being delighted by how the piece looked and worked. ■



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Jewelry At Mark Loren Designs

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