

OSCAR HEYMAN:

90 YEARS OF INNOVATION

One of the most influential manufacturers of the 20th century ups the ante in the new millennium with a more proactive marketing approach and hands-on support for retailers.



Butterflies, hummingbirds, and strawberries are among Oscar Heyman's treasure trove of original designs.



The company's signature gardenia brooch is a "year-in, year-out strong seller."

As one of the industry's premier jewelry manufacturers and designers for almost a century, Oscar Heyman & Brothers is an intriguing mix of the Old and New Worlds.

The New York-based business was founded in 1912 by Latvian immigrant brothers Oscar, Nathan, and Harry Heyman, who were later joined by Louis, William, and George and sisters Lena and Frances. The company has produced some of the most important diamond, platinum, and colored stone jewelry of the 20th century. For 90 years, the firm has kept all its operations in its own workshop, including cutting and polishing stones, alloying precious metals, making tools and dies, and designing and manufacturing each piece of finished jewelry it sells. It was a pioneer in both platinum and colored stone design and owns seven manufacturing patents.

Over the decades, Oscar Heyman has been a fixture behind the scenes, crafting designs for some of the most prestigious names in jewelry retailing, including Cartier; Bailey Banks & Biddle; Neiman Marcus; Black Starr and Frost; Shreve & Co.; Shreve, Crump & Low; and Van Cleef & Arpels. Today, Oscar Heyman combines 100-year-old skills with cutting-edge technology to serve the ideals upon which its founders built their business: impeccable quality, unmatched craftsmanship, and superior customer service.

"Our philosophy has always been to make the best-quality jewelry in the world, through our classic, timeless designs that showcase the natural beauty of gems," says Tom Heyman, a principal and third-generation member of the founding family. "We want to design jewelry the heirs will fight over to keep and cherish, not pieces the heirs fight over to sell."



Old values, modern methods.

Oscar Heyman blends its "old school" European values with a modern American approach. Case in point: The company celebrated its 90th anniversary this year by teaming up with celebrity shoe designer Stuart Weitzman, Platinum Guild International, and the American Gem Trade Association to create a one-of-a-kind pair of ruby and platinum shoes for the 75th annual Academy Awards in March. The unique 4½-in. stiletto sandals, inspired by Dorothy's famous ruby slippers from *The Wizard of Oz*, feature 642 round and oval Burma rubies totaling more than 120 cts.

The company also says it has entered the new millennium with a more proactive marketing strategy—for example, selling its signature invisibly set jewelry under its own name, rather than stamping the pieces with the name of the retailer as it has done since the 1930s. Another first: Oscar Heyman is producing a new catalog, ads, and other marketing materials co-branded with both the retailer's name and the Heyman name. The firm also is taking a more hands-on approach to working with retailers in the stores. Company representatives can often be found behind store counters, working with store salespeople to learn about their needs and offer support.

"We tell the stores that our staff is at their disposal to help them make the sale," Tom Heyman says. "We give them back-office support, a supply of stones, and access to our expert design staff. And it's not uncommon for a salesperson to call us when the customer is in the store so we can answer any questions, and to offer timely expert advice to help the salesperson close the sale."

JCK saw this initiative first-hand during a recent visit to Oscar Heyman's Madison Avenue offices. Almost on cue, a retailer calls Tom Heyman from the sales floor with a question from a customer about the possibility of altering a particular ring design. Heyman picks up a catalog, flips to the design, and gets into a detailed discussion with the retailer about the various design elements of the piece. Heyman quickly concludes that the alteration is feasible. "We'll sketch the new design and fax it to you today," he tells the retailer. Heyman hangs up the phone, dashes off to his in-house designer with the information, and requests a quick line sketch ASAP.



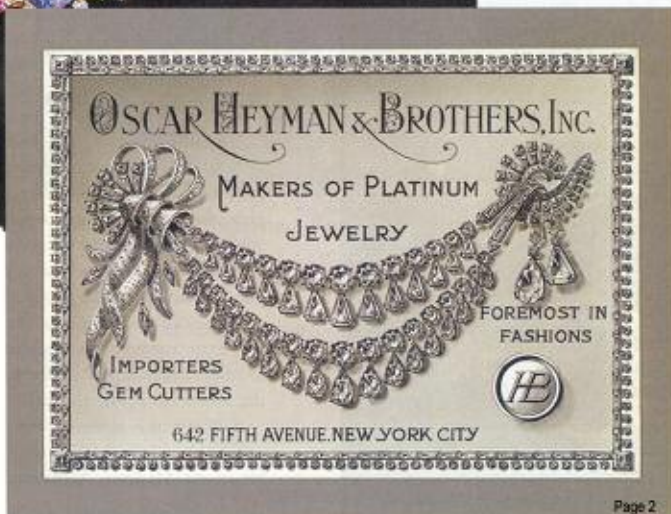
Company co-founder
Oscar Heyman

"We've known the Heymans for 50 years, and there's nobody that understands service as well as they do," says Donald Fogg, owner of F.D. Fogg Jewelers in Albuquerque, N.M. "There's nothing they wouldn't do for you. If you said you needed a particular piece, they'd have 10 for you. They're super-helpful, they give you the opportunity to speak to several different people, and the craftsmanship of their pieces is of the highest caliber. They're also really nice folks, from top to bottom."

A reflection of history. Acknowledged as one of the finest gemstone jewelry manufacturers in the world, Oscar Heyman & Brothers was one of the first U.S. jewelry manufacturers to source colored stones directly from Asia. Starting in the early 1930s, the Heymans and their



Oscar Heyman says its "niche will continue to be color," as exemplified by this spectacular necklace.



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buyers traveled regularly to India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and other exotic locales in search of the finest colored stones, says Adam Heyman, another principal. "This was very rare at that time," he notes.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the firm developed and copyrighted a number of important jewelry manufacturing procedures involving hinge systems and metal processing. Also, rather than develop cast band rings like most jewelers, Oscar Heyman made die-struck bands to form a seamless, stronger circle. The company worked strictly in platinum until about 1950, when it added gold to its repertoire.

Many of the company's most famous designs were among the best-selling styles of their time. These include Art Deco pieces from the 1920s; the signature gardenia and pansy brooches, created in the 1930s; the five-row ring, created in 1935-36, which Marvin Heyman says "helped Oscar Heyman emerge from the Depression"; a variation on the five-row ring developed in the late 1940s that sold even better than the original; the ballerina ring, a style the company designed in 1959 that was probably its single most popular ring style for the next 12-15 years (and which was copied endlessly, since the firm never copyrighted it); and the frog design of the early 1990s, which was the firm's best seller for three years.

Oscar Heyman also is known for its straight-line oval diamond necklace and entourage ring with oval diamonds around the central colored stone. The firm was one of the few manufacturers using fancy shapes and color in these types of pieces in the 1920s and 1930s. And in 1916, the firm developed and patented dies for block bracelets—a breakthrough that revolutionized how bracelets were made. Most had been crafted by

hand before Oscar Heyman came out with a stamped version, Marvin Heyman says.

Oscar Heyman's signature pieces still sell well. The famous gardenia brooch, for example, is a "year-in, year-out strong seller," says Tom Heyman. And last year, the firm made a "very important" ballerina ring with a pink diamond in the center, he adds.

The rarified status of the company and the high regard for its jewelry designs is verified by the premium prices Oscar Heyman estate pieces command at Christie's and Sotheby's.

According to Joyce Jonas, president emeritus of the American Society of Jewelry Historians, Oscar Heyman is one of the "most important jewelry houses of the 20th century." Jonas notes that the company was involved in virtually every popular style in every time period during that span.

"Because Heyman manufactured for so many retailers, the company had to be very versatile and became the hidden face behind every top jeweler in the country," she said. "Historically, they are a window into the most popular styles for people of taste and elegance throughout the century—and their archives read like a history of the 20th century."

On a more industry-specific level, Jonas also notes that Oscar Heyman was a pioneer in the use of fine colored stones and remains one of the world's top platinum jewelry designers.

"Here were these Russian immigrants who had an outstanding ability to work in platinum, at a time [in the early 20th century] when platinum was a relatively new jewelry metal in the United States," Jonas says. "They traveled the world looking for the perfect matching stones, they pushed the best materials, and every piece they did was a work of art. They made—and continue to

make—some of the most exquisite pieces anywhere."

With much of its business devoted to special-order pieces designed for specific retail customers, Oscar Heyman has amassed a treasure trove of original designs ranging from the classic to the whimsical: bejeweled snowmen, harlequins, American flags, Christmas trees, fish, sailboats, hummingbirds, eagles, butterflies, strawberries, cats, dogs, and countless others. The company's sketches fill several file cabinets. Each piece is stamped with the Oscar Heyman mark and a unique serial number—and the firm keeps extensive records of these serial numbers along with the sketches, to identify and date pieces. "Custom orders are one of our specialties," says Adam Heyman. "We enjoy the challenge of interpreting in jewels a snowman, a harlequin, or something from a photograph."

Tom Heyman relates the story of one retailer's client, an energetic California woman in her 60s, who is a champion hackney pony racer. Oscar Heyman is designing an equestrian brooch for her based on a photograph of her in action.

Retailer Donald Fogg recalls another incident involving a regular customer—a cowboy from eastern New Mexico—calling from his cell phone while on horseback to request a special ruby and diamond cirlet that he needed in a week. Of course, Oscar Heyman handled that order as well.

Over the years, Oscar Heyman designs have adorned many of the rich and famous. For instance, the company developed several pieces that went to the moon during the Apollo 16 mission, including a replica of a shoulder patch. The manufacturer also designed a diamond necklace sold to Cartier in 1969 for Elizabeth Taylor to showcase the stunning Taylor/Burton Diamond.

The Queen of Thailand owns one of the company's necklaces, and the firm also made several pieces that were sold to the Sultan of Brunei and members of the royal family of Saudi Arabia in the 1970s.

In its 90 years of existence, Oscar Heyman has built up a resource of 20,000 to 30,000 original die molds. "When we get a request, we can reach into our dies and recast a piece," says Tom Heyman. This ability to "reach into the past" and remake an older piece from its vast inventory has come in handy for the company on more than one occasion.

According to a story that ran in the *Oregonian* on April 2, 2002, a customer purchased a unique engagement ring from Carl Greve Jewelers in downtown Portland, Ore., in 1950. Unfortunately, the ring was lost in 1962. Forty years later, the customer found the sales contract for the ring while cleaning his attic. The customer contacted Nick Greve, Carl's grandson, to see if the ring could be duplicated as a 52nd anniversary present for his wife. With nothing more than the customer's name and the date of the purchase to go by, Nick Greve hunted down the old paperwork on the ring from the store basement and determined that it had been made by Oscar Heyman & Brothers. He then called Tom Heyman, who found the original work card and the original mold. Oscar Heyman made the ring for the customer again—an exact duplicate of the first.

So what will the next 90 years hold for Oscar Heyman & Brothers? "Our niche will continue to be color, with the finest quality materials and design," says Tom Heyman. "We will continue to be more active in promoting our name to the public. And we will continue to do everything we can to give value-added support to our retail partners." ♦