



Design



True Colors

Expert craftsmanship and endless creativity: The jewelry of Ayala Bar

The ordinary looking building, or factory, that houses the studio of jewelry designer Ayala Bar doesn't reveal a hint of the magic that unfolds upon entering. A large space where a different world of material peeks out of every corner and everything adds up to feel like a kind of miniature amusement park – or, if you prefer, a store filled with colorful candies and life.

I meet Ayala in her workspace, the most colorful of all, full of threads in every color and texture, beads of every size, color and shape, small jewelry parts, a seemingly endless collection of fabrics and more. We begin to speak and I quickly understand that the beauty is contained in the

contrast between her varied jewelry, a maddening and uncompromising mix of shapes, materials and colors, and Ayala herself, who isn't in the least bothered by the chaos. Something in her modesty and desire to skip irrelevancies in order to allow her to create and invent, leaving her alone in the work that must eventually be sold – expose a creative soul that simply...succeeded.

It's worth mentioning here that the Ayala Bar brand of jewelry may not be well-known in Israel, but abroad – that is in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Europe (a partial list) – it's a huge success, certainly on the scale of a local business. Talking numbers, Bar's

exports add up to \$4 million a year, with sales in about 3,000 locations. If we're looking for stardust, Gwyneth Paltrow is already a customer, as is Kate Moss and not long ago, Kate Winslett. This is the dream of every artist, especially an Israeli.

So how did it all begin?

“Twenty-five years ago on the Nahalat Binyamin pedestrian mall in Tel Aviv. I'd been creative all my life and also studied at the Ramat Hasharon college, which at the time was a kind of supermarket of expertise. But I didn't study jewelry design, I wanted to know how to do everything, and I did: sculpture, drawing, sewing, and photography. I made jewelry at home using all the knowledge I had acquired and brought it to the open-air mall. I didn't really know what I was doing – which may have been the beauty of it – but I made a kind of collage jewelry from gold and silver with beads stuck on, and people liked it very much. Maybe because it was very different, with lots of color and different shapes”. Things developed quickly as demand grew. At first she enlisted her sisters to sell, but afterward people from the Israel Export Institute approached her tiny stand and offered assistance that was more professional, more workers were hired, exhibitions began and, consequently, also serious sales.

When did you start treating it seriously?

“When a guy came up >>>



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▶▶▶ and said he wanted to try selling the jewelry abroad. Then I rented a small shop near home. At a later stage Joel Ron, an old friend, returned to Israel and I suggested that he take a part of the business”.

They're together until this day, she on the art and he on the business. “That was a significant step in the establishment of the business, and from there things raced ahead. I was seriously enamored of it, I was flooded with ideas. I began traveling in search of materials and reached India, where I found fabrics that captivated me, and began making beads from them. It was what I had been searching for”. In parallel, there were offers from all over the world to market the jewelry. And, naturally, there were worries about making beads from the Indian cloth, which might tatter and get dirty. But as Bar says, "There's no such thing as impossible". And it was a good thing that they pushed ahead: The beads, made from fabric using a special technique, have become a trademark.

How do you explain the success?

“I think people like the combinations of color and the twists that we do with the materials. In general, what drives me is the material, and the significance is that any material is 'kosher' to be a partner, in my point of view. In the final analysis, I'm a diligent worker ant: Perhaps I decided to make light, not expensive jewelry, but in effect I make life tough for everyone here”, she laughs. If so, it's not surprising that



unlike many in the field, Bar doesn't suffer from the copying phenomenon. Simply because of the difficulty in replicating her work. It's not as if they haven't tried, but as she explains: “It takes a great deal of work to get to the proper level, otherwise no one will be tempted to buy”.

How would you define your target market?

“It surprises even us. Women of every age looking to express themselves in a way that's not dictated by passing trends. It's funny, because sometimes the

trend reaches us. Right now, for example, there's something 'fashionably correct' in my jewelry, because people are seeking proximity to hand work and originality. That's very fine – but trends will never influence my design. Still, there's something that genuinely passes on, because in truth that's what sells”.

Bar is courageous enough to admit that she's “not attached to fashion. Even ignorant. I like what's pleasant to me and don't rub shoulders too much with the industry”.

The general manager, Joel Ron, joins us at this stage.

“Ayala's jewelry is constantly on the border between how to be known well enough to be a successful brand and staying away from being a mass product”, he interjects. “It's very delicate, very tricky, because on one hand everyone clearly wants to succeed and sell a great deal, but on the other hand that's what shortens a brand's lifespan. Therefore trends pass, but this jewelry doesn't. We prefer being a little bit on the fringe, on the outside, but with long life”.

Are you afraid it will all end some day? The ideas, the inspiration?

“I think everyone creative knows that fear, but it never ends. Whenever I think it's over, I suddenly encounter something I've never seen before and create something new. The constant search isn't easy, there are days of frustration and days of creative breakthrough, but in sum total I very much love the journey”. ➔