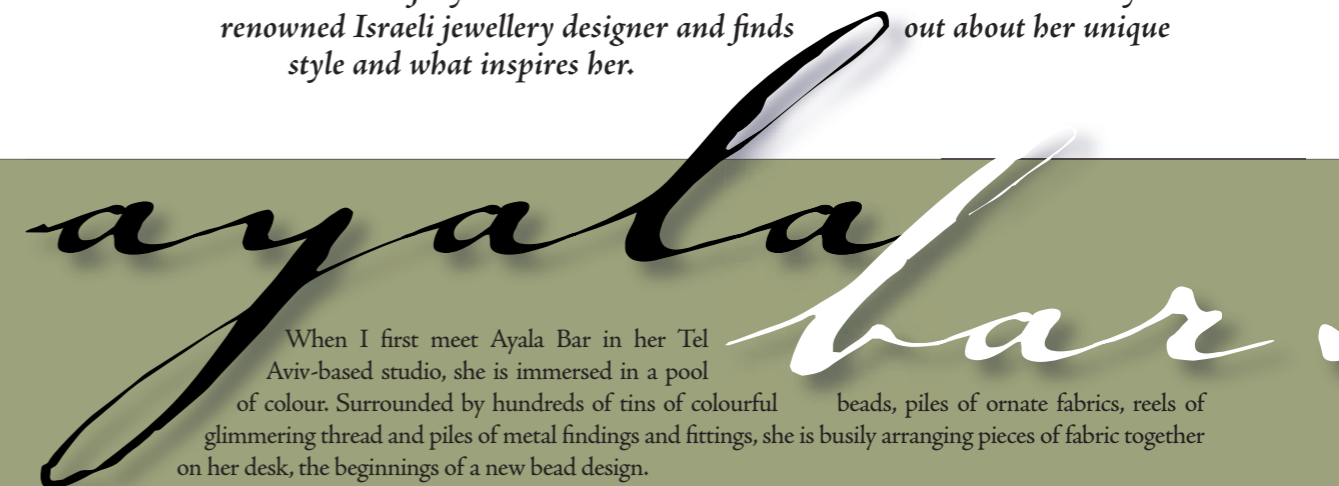


# art deco meets east

by Sharon Givoni

A unique blend of colourful and textural contrasts best describes the stunning creations of Ayala Bar. Sharon Givoni talks to this internationally renowned Israeli jewellery designer and finds out about her unique style and what inspires her.



When I first meet Ayala Bar in her Tel Aviv-based studio, she is immersed in a pool of colour. Surrounded by hundreds of tins of colourful beads, piles of ornate fabrics, reels of glimmering thread and piles of metal findings and fittings, she is busily arranging pieces of fabric together on her desk, the beginnings of a new bead design.

For Ayala, the creative process never stops, her inspiration coming from life's daily activities, from outings with her children to the local park to peering at piles of trash (ironically enough, one of her favourite sources of inspiration!) and secondhand markets to name a few. "Everything from my immediate experience can trigger my creative impulse."

Welcome to the eclectic world of Ayala Bar, who has been making jewellery now for over 20 years, after ditching a career in costume design for theatre and visual merchandising to cultivate her long held passion for making jewellery, something which had always been confined to an after hours hobby.

"The beginning was by no means easy", says Bar.

"I set up a small market stall stand at a local art and craft market on the weekends between my full time work, and simply waited for my pieces to sell."

While her distinctive pieces caught the eye of many passers by, the unusual combinations of colours and materials were not to everyone's taste and sales were slow to start. Bar was not perturbed. As far as she was concerned, the strong reaction that the jewellery elicited from passers by was in itself a good sign. "I knew my product was different from the range of jewellery already out there and felt confident from the limited feedback that I had gotten that it was really just a matter of time."

Time, patience and perseverance it turned out, was the key to Bar's ultimate success and in a matter of weeks, her "regulars" from the weekly market stands were eagerly returning to see what new and unique treasures Bar had on offer. Bar developed a reputation for her bold, unique and decorative style and in a few months, sheer demand led to the opening of a small but vibrant jewellery boutique located on one of the trendier shopping strips in the heart of Tel Aviv.

Struggling to keep up with the orders, Bar employed a handful of assistants who literally worked "by my kitchen sink" at her apartment. Bar's jewellery store kept thriving but the reality hit that Bar would need to expand beyond the confines of the relatively limited Israeli market if she wanted to succeed on a larger scale. This triggered a search for export opportunities, and attending major trade shows in Europe and New York turned out to be the key to expanding her market. To make her jewellery more marketable overseas, under the guidance of her managing director Joel Ron, she developed seasonal collections that changed every six months. The orders rolled in...

## AYALA BAR TODAY

Today, Bar's work sells around the world including the US, Canada, UK, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Japan, Scandinavia and, of course, in Australia (see the list of Australian outlets over the page). Her Israeli based factory employs approximately fifty people who spend day after day on the delicate task of handcrafting each individual piece. "No two pieces are the same", says Bar proudly showing me around the colourful work studios that include textile design, assembly,



Capture Your Radiance

packaging and quality control. "I encourage all my craftspeople to add their own individual touch so when people buy my pieces they know they are getting something unique - not produced from a factory batch line."

#### CHALLENGES IN TODAY'S MARKET

Today, Bar says one of her greatest challenges is making her works marketable and commercially sellable on a global scale, without compromising her individuality and artistic creativity. "While I need to stay abreast of fashion trends" (which she does by subscribing to a variety of European fashion magazines) "there can be a very fine balance between nurturing my craft and being bound by the whims of public taste." Nevertheless, she seems to strike the balance well as demand for her work continues to grow and her creativity continues to flourish with new colourful ranges. "The strong emphasis on contrasts and unexpected combinations of colours and materials is what I focus on and this tends to be the signature trade mark of my designs."

In fact, Bar talks about contrasts a lot, a theme that attracts her in her day to day life.

She lives in the country but can literally see the outline of high rises of the city from her own home. A meal of chocolate and salad eaten at the same time is not unusual for Bar. And when she dresses she loves combining more traditional dressing styles and the modern fashion (this is evident from what she is wearing on the day of our interview, a smart chiffon top with a bohemian skirt and a striking unfinished necklace, some of the strings still hanging loose). Her work is full of contrasts. "I love soft tassels and unfinished fabric edges alongside smooth and shimmering crystals, warm rusty colours juxtaposed with pale aquamarines and blues, old antique like fabrics against the shimmer of glass and sequins and traditional 'art deco' styles combined with Middle Eastern and Asian themes. I like to call myself a matchmaker of materials." As you can see from the pictures, it's a recipe that works!

#### FABRIC BEADS

Ayala is known for her fabric beads made from exotic fabrics, which was initially inspired by the colourful silks in India while on a buying trip several years ago. At the time the fabric beads were unlike anything she had done before and the quirky and colourful combination of fabric and metals had great appeal with younger customers who identified with this retro and vintage look. She calls this her Hip Collection that blends richly coloured fabrics with glass beads and stones. In contrast to this, her main collection focuses more on immensely complicated structures featuring collage-like mosaics made of metals embedded with beads and stones.

#### WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

In terms of future plans, Ayala Bar is currently at the final stages of expanding her product range from jewellery to other fashion accessories. "Ayala's eclectic jewellery styles lend themselves perfectly to bags, belts, wallets and jewellery boxes", says Joel Ron, her Managing Director, adding with enthusiasm that their first range of bags are about to hit the stores in three weeks time.

#### AN ADDICTION TO BEADS

A self-confessed bead addict, Ayala says "beads to me are like sweets to a child in a sweet store. They are magical... the light, the colours, their textures and the way they rustle and swish around on your neck and ears".

Materials of any sort are also great - ribbons, old books, oxidised leaves, plastic, glass, all of that greatly inspires me." Again, something that is reflected in her eclectic pieces. "I come into my colourful office and put bits and pieces together till it works" (she says, absently moving scraps of material on the table). "I just like to play" she says, summing up with a laugh.

Ayala's works can be viewed on her website [www.ayalabar.com](http://www.ayalabar.com)

They are sold at boutiques Australia-wide including Serenity, Prosperity and Scally and Trombone in Melbourne, Dreams and Miani in Western Australia, Objects Ink in South Australia, HATHI, Family Jewels, Giftica and LIFE of BYRON in Sydney and Gallery Gondwana in Central Australia.

For more information on outlets contact Dervish Jewellery on 02 6655 0907 or 02 6655 9548.