

PRISM

Winter 2010

**AGTA
SPECTRUM
AWARDS™**

**MEMBER PROFILE:
DONNA CHAMBERS**

**EDITORIAL
COVERAGE 101**

**BRING ON THE
BROWNS**

**MAURICE SHIRE
PASSES**



MEMBER PROFILE: DONNA CHAMBERS



Donna Chambers, fine jewelry goldsmith and designer, has achieved an enviable level of success that began with a gifted past and ambitious goals. Born and raised in Ossining, New York, Donna was recognized at an early age by Vera Linens for her talents in artistic design. Vera hired Donna as a teenager to create textile designs for her multi-million dollar design operation that was located in Donna's hometown. Linens established a fund and scholarship in honor of her late husband, and Donna became the first recipient of the scholarship. In 1968, Donna went to Pratt Institute from which she graduated Cum Laude with a Bachelors Degree in Fine Arts.

In 1976, Donna became part owner of a jewelry repair shop that serviced fifteen neighborhood jewelry concerns in the downtown Brooklyn area, as well as A & S Department Store. Three years later, after having refined her skills, Donna expanded and created the Donna Chambers Collection.

Donna Chambers had been in the business for a long time before she became an AGTA Member. When the Spectrum of Design Pavilion opened, she saw an opportunity and seized it. "I am inspired at GemFair Tucson. The whole town is buzzing with a massive source of creativity," stated Chambers. Encouragement and warmth from Mary Lou Keen, the AGTA Trade Show Manger, also helped Donna select this venue as an annual show.

In fact it was in Tucson, that she came across a table displaying 18th-century Chinese gaming chips made of mother of pearl. The dish of beautifully carved pieces inspired Donna. "I picked up a few and made two or three pins with them," says Chambers.

The reaction to these unique pieces was so strong that Chambers spun her discovery into her signature jewelry line. She uses the traditional gaming chips in all shapes: round, oval, triangular, marquise, square; in any number of unique settings, including rings, necklaces, pins and earrings.

Most of the chips were made from 1736 to 1796, during the Ch'ing Dynasty, under the reign of the philosopher emperor Ch'ien Lung. However, the chips are more representative of the British "gambling craze" in the 18th century. The chips were imported as gambling counters. Wealthy British families



would commission carved chips from Chinese artists with their family crest in the center and the outer edges engraved with flowers, butterflies, pagodas or geometric designs. The chips' shapes signified the owner's amount of wealth. The exquisitely beautiful counters were transported to England after the British were ousted from China for perpetuating the Opium War.

Chambers has long been an admirer of David Yurman. To her surprise he was familiar with her work as well. Yurman urged her to begin working with colored gemstones. Her contemporary design and use of color make the one-of-a-kind pieces come alive. Chambers buys the chips from several English antique dealers, combining them with colored gemstones, and then her process begins with a building technique. Each piece is individually hand-fabricated. With the use of channel wire, round wire, flat plate, and patterned tubing, Chambers builds the wire work which is the foundation of each piece. After the wire work is built, the piece is pre-polished and then her signature technique of pearling is added to bring each piece to life. Each pearl is picked and strung on wires which are skillfully burned down one by one creating that signature Donna Chambers look. Each piece is stamped with the Donna Chambers DC logo and is accompanied by a Certificate of Authenticity which tells the history of the antique Chinese gambling chip and guarantees its authenticity.

Donna Chambers, Gilberto McFarlane and Gail Chambers Redd have spent almost 30 years together developing the Donna Chambers Collection. Donna creating and making the samples and one-of-a-kind pieces, Gilberto, a second generation jeweler, has the masterful job of producing their quality product. Donna's sister Gail is the master of putting the pearl patterns together. "We are the Dream Team."

Chambers has started working with silver, and will be unveiling her new designs at AGTA GemFair™ Tucson. Chambers says, "As a designer you have to be flexible-willing to bend. It has been a different journey working with the new metal and becoming accustomed to it." Chambers intends to expand this line with different colors, shapes and textures from the show, and to keep it affordable. Chambers feels that jewelry now needs to be multi-functional and for every day use.

"A woman can always wear pearls, and I am feeling really good about my silver."

Chambers loves working with chocolate pearls, blue topaz and pink tourmaline. She is also using strands of pearls with diamond-cut gemstone beads. "By adding an enhancer that the wearer can mix- it's really hot!"

Chamber's fine jewelry collection has been carried by major department stores such as Bloomingdale's, Fortunoff's, Saks Fifth Avenue and Na Hoku, as well as at jewelry chains from coast to coast. Pieces of Chambers jewelry have been shown at the Smithsonian Institute and the Boston Museum of Art.

To learn more about Donna Chambers, visit her at AGTA GemFair™ Tucson and www.donnachambersdesigns.com. ▲

Photos by Azad Photography. Images from left to right:
14K gold pin/pendant featuring gambling chips and cultured pearls
14K gold ring featuring gambling chip and diamonds
Sterling silver enhancer featuring gambling chips, amethyst and cultured pearl strand.
14K gold cross pin/pendant featuring gambling chips, cultured pearls, citrine and peridot
Sterling silver enhancer featuring gambling chips, rose quartz/amethyst cultured pearl strand and pink tourmaline beads
Sterling silver enhancer featuring sand blasted black onyx.

