

PARTNERS IN SHINE

Collaborations between stores and designers are becoming more popular than ever. Three retailers give us the inside scoop on their lucrative team-ups. By Beth Bernstein



“This shift reflects a bigger trend in which brands are providing a more personalized approach”

The Seven: A flexible model

“Collaborating on exclusive designs provides both stores and designers with a competitive edge, enhancing the overall experience for the collector,” says Camille Zarsky, owner of The Seven in West Village, New York. “By having one-of-a-kind pieces or offering designs specific to our store, we attract and retain clients long-term.”

For Zarsky, “one of the most exciting changes in the past few years is that independent designers have the capacity to produce smaller batches and to craft one-off pieces. This flexibility allows the designers we work with to explore their creativity, and it helps us to present our clients with more one-of-a-kind pieces, allowing them to express their individuality and tell their stories through their jewelry. This shift reflects a bigger trend in which brands are providing a more personalized

approach, recognizing the value of offering unique experiences. [This] is so important in today’s market, in which more and more clients want something that no one else has.”

Do the designers have the freedom to maintain their signature styles? “Always,” Zarsky asserts. “We choose the designer for their point of view and then work with them on pieces that reflect their sensibility, but perhaps in a color or shape that they haven’t done before. Another way in which we collaborate is to incorporate a meaningful sentiment or stone that a client wants to highlight.”

One example she cites is her collaborations with Los Angeles-based designer Emily P. Wheeler. “These have drawn a lot of interest from our collectors, because they are so identifiably Emily, but we work on exclusive palettes, sizes, shapes to make them unique to The Seven.”

From left: Camille Zarsky; Emily P. Wheeler Bride necklace in white gold, blue zircons and diamonds, exclusively at The Seven.



That kind of targeted service extends to the way she and her team shop jewelry shows. “We will have a list of our clients, and when we see these one-offs, we will send them photos right away and ultimately wind up buying pieces for many of our customers right at the show.”

Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok enable women to see all types of jewelry from myriad sources, she notes. “This is one of the driving forces behind our clients’ desire for more individualized pieces... rather than styles that everyone else can own.”

She has brought in one-of-a-kind contemporary pieces from brands such as Sylva & Cie, Irene Neuwirth, Arunashi, and Victor Velyan, and has turned to New York estate jeweler Fred Leighton for authentic Georgian, Victorian, Art Deco and Retro styles. “We also work with designers to reinvent and create a new style just for the store. Many of our designers are really open to this as well.”

Marissa Collections: Standing out from the crowd

At Florida jeweler Marissa Collections, the collaboration story is a bit different.

“It started back in 2005,” recalls Jennifer McCurry, buyer and lead fine-jewelry curator for the company, which has stores in Naples and Palm Beach. “We were seeing all of these great one-of-a-kind pieces from designers at shows like Couture in Las Vegas. These were striking and stood out, so instead of continuing to buy into just the core collections, we began to purchase these one-offs. Both of our stores are in small communities; therefore, women don’t want to feel as if someone else is going to be wearing the same piece. They desire pieces that are unique to their personality that no one else will have. We started to move more toward this point of view, and it has grown and been successful ever since.”



IMAGES: THE SEVEN; MARISSA COLLECTIONS


Clockwise from top left: Jennifer McCurry; Victor Velyan Australian opal and diamond earrings in 18-karat yellow gold; Katherine Jetter Twilight Orchid ring in 18-karat gold with a Colombian emerald, pink sapphires, and diamonds.



Over the past few years, designers have become more willing to accommodate retailers' requests for both exclusive items and special client orders, she reports. "The way we work with our designers is to modify core pieces in a way that resonates more with my clientele. We will create different colorways or different versions of an existing piece, which will then only be available at Tiny Gods."

She makes sure to choose "brands with extremely strong signature styles, and give them the freedom to branch out and work with us on different projects that will result in the look and feel that will also echo the ethos of our store."

Beaver has a solid list of such partnerships. She worked with Mexican jewelry artist Daniela Villegas to choose the colorway and gemstones for a one-of-a-kind beetle ring, and commissioned a signet ring from Los Angeles-based company Retrouvaí with the message "I see you and I love you." Beaver also collaborated with Parisian brand Rainbow K on its Ball Chain necklace — using "a custom gold color combination and a different number of pavé balls" to appeal to her clientele — and with London-based jeweler Ananya on an exclusive colorway for its Chakra bracelet.

It's not just brands, either. "Stephanie Anders, a world-renowned piercing artist, does three-day piercing residencies at Tiny Gods. I decided to ask Stephanie to work with [New York-based jeweler] Sorellina, which creates studs that all my clients love. They merged aesthetics, and I introduced a six-piece capsule that launched in the fall of 2022 with an in-store event." 

Tiny Gods: Merging aesthetics

The boom in online shopping and marketing has played a significant role in the rise of collaborations, according to Mary Margaret Beaver, owner of Tiny Gods in Charlotte, North Carolina.

"Customers have more accessibility to multiple jewelry stores due to social media and a greater online presence than ever before. Therefore, retailers are looking for noteworthy ways to have their product offerings stand out," she explains. "Commissioning special pieces from designers that are unique to Tiny Gods is fun, and it's also an opportunity to strengthen the relationship with these brands, which always sets us up for mutual long-term success."

From top: Mary Margaret Beaver; Retrouvaí x Tiny Gods signet ring in 14-karat gold with the message "I see you and I love you."



IMAGES: TINY GODS