

STERLING



AMBITION

words by Robert Mebo
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Right: Carnelian Earrings.

Opposite Page Left: Lime Chalcedony, Aquamarine, Citrine and Amazonite bracelet

Opposite Page Right: The designer at her studio in Bali.

Canadian jewelry designer Dalia Alfandary has a pretty clear idea of what she is meant to be doing in life, “I know Bali is where I want to be and here I can do everything I ever wanted to do with jewelry,” she says. But the road to Bali and her becoming an internationally recognized jewelry artisan hasn’t always been so clearly defined, or easy.

At the age of seven, her parents migrated from her birthplace, the biblically significant city of Beersheva, Israel to search for a better life in Canada. The turbulent religious climate in Beersheva and the surrounding areas was proving to have a negative affect on Dalia and her older sister, so their parents, who only a few years earlier escaped from Yugoslavia, decided it was once again time to move on and test the more amiable soil of Canada where less stringent immigration laws afforded relatively trouble free asylum.

Whilst in Canada, her parents acted quickly to acclimatize to their new surroundings by attending English school. Her father, who had always been known to have a penchant for beautiful women and a roving eye to match became smitten by one of the teachers at the school and fashioned for her a brass necklace that he made in the basement of the family’s Toronto home. The necklace served as a stepping-stone for her father’s future career as a world famous jewelry designer. In a very short time her father, Rafael, became the celebrity





jewelry designer of choice, having fashioned his trademark oversized brass rings, necklaces and pendants for notable personalities such as Mohammed Ali, Jackie Onassis and many others. Meanwhile Dalia was sitting close by, at times on his lap, watching him manipulate the raw materials he used in his designs into beautiful pieces of jewelry. Her desire to be close to her father inadvertently made her a pupil of his trade and although the father-daughter relationship would soon crumble, her love for creating jewelry would be much more lasting.

“As a little girl my sister and I were already making hand-made chains,” she says of the early start she got in her father’s factory where

she would work during school holidays. “We’d also make Fimo pins, the kind of plastic you’d set in the oven. By the time I was nine, I was selling these to stores and boutiques around our home.”

Riding on the tide of fame and fresh into a third marriage, her father moved the girls to Austin, Texas where he would continue to build his reputation as a master jeweler. By then Dalia was certain that if there was one thing she knew well, it was jewelry, so at high school’s end, her and her sister attended the renowned Paris Junior College in Austin; the nation’s top jewel and gemology school. Their father however, wasn’t so supportive. “He basically felt that he could do a better job

Above Right: Garnet necklace.

Above Left: Pernite bracelet.



Above Right: Aquamarine bracelet

Above Left: Peridot and Lime Chalcedony necklace.



teaching us himself,” she says of her father’s decision to pull the girls from the school. Without his financial support she was forced to work at his Austin factory doing various jobs while contemplating what it was she was going to do to finally get out from under the wing of such a headstrong man.

Within one year of working for her father, she decided to call it quits and try to open her own jewelry store. At the young age of nineteen she found a small shop in one of Austin’s shopping malls and opened Dalia Sixteen, a boutique featuring her own unique designs. “I was making what was current, what was happening, what people wanted,” she says of the venture, “I would sit in the shop, which

was on a relatively busy road, and I would make the jewelry right there. People would come in and watch me. It was fun.” Fun and successful. Within a year she opened two more boutiques in the same mall. All of them flourished until a sluggish economy set upon America and Texas and retailers felt the brunt of the dollar’s decline. A year later every store in the mall had closed its doors to the public, Dalia Sixteen was the last survivor. Finally it too was forced to close.

In the face of a boarded up dream, Dalia decided to move to California to take a job with a large diamond company where she was employed as a diamond grader. The job gave her valuable experience both in



terms of working with new mediums and understanding how large jewelry companies operate. Then, in 1990, tragedy struck.

While driving home from eating out one night the car she was traveling in was struck from behind causing her to be violently jarred resulting in extensive cerebral damage that would lead to years of short term memory loss, confusion and the inability to concentrate. Life as she knew it was altered in a second. Her ability to function as a jeweler escaped her. She would spend the next seven years searching for a way to get back on her feet and regain the astute mental capacity that once was the foundation of her becoming a master jeweler in her own right. “Instinctively I felt that I needed to travel to help my recovery,”

she recalls. “I went to a cognitive therapy clinic and they said I would get better, but it would take five to seven years.”

In the pursuit of health, recovery and meaning she set off to revisit the places of her youth. With each city visited she moved closer to understanding what she wanted from life and along the way was exposed to various cultural details that would later refine her eye for beautiful jewelry.

She eventually found her way to Bali and knew almost immediately that this was where she wanted to rebuild her life. So she invested money into a factory and workspace and began again to create jewelry. She began on a large scale, servicing some of America’s bigger retail shopping chains but then felt it was time to

Above Left: Garnet bracelet.

Above Top and Bottom:
Aquamarine and Citrine rings.

Opposite Page Left: Green
Chalcedony ring, Aquamarine ring
and Aquamarine and Citrine
ring.

Opposite Page Right: Citrine,
Aquamarine and Carnelian bracelet.

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stop creating for the masses but rather produce what was in her heart to make. “At first I would look at the customer and see what she wanted,” she says of her earlier approach to design, “now I see myself in each piece. Now I am designing pieces that I feel jewelry should be.”

Over the last twelve years she has built her business, Dalia & Co. into an internationally desired brand. Her elegant and feminine designs of sterling silver and semi-precious stones are easily worn for casual and formal occasions. This year she will launch her first collection of gold jewelry. “Gold jewelry really represents what I believe jewelry is; it’s beautiful, it’s artistic, it’s valuable and you have a lasting connection to it,” she says with the confidence of someone who once again knows exactly what she belongs and what she wants. It seems as if she has finally traveled fully down the road to recovery. *FRV*

