

The Private Jeweller

by Philippa Barr

At a recent ball, I met a friend who was wearing the most incredible necklace. "Ooh," I gasped naively, "It's gorgeous. What's it made of?" In my own jewel box, genuine cubic zirconia is the best you'll find. But no, this was the real thing. And you could tell – both by the amazing glow of the diamonds, and by the amazing glow of the wearer.

There is no doubt that genuine jewellery can be bought in Asia at better prices than in the West: the cost of craftsmanship is lower here. It can be difficult to know what you're buying, though. One way to confidently navigate the path to buying good quality jewellery is by finding your own private jeweller.

According to Vinod More, Managing Director of The Jewel Box, there are three main reasons people visit a private jeweller:

- They are looking for something unique or exclusive.
- They want something particular custom made.
- They need someone reliable to repair or restore their jewellery.

Most customers who come in to buy something new plan to spend between \$1,000 and \$10,000, he says.

"The first thing we want to do is to develop a rapport with the customer and get to know her – her physical attributes, such as skin tone; her personality; what she likes to wear; and whether she is flamboyant or traditional. Some customers come in with a specific aim – to set 16 stones in a piece for a 16th birthday, incorporate initials into an engagement ring, or something like that. Others prefer to browse through our ready-made collection. Actually, many of our customers are men, looking for advice on what to buy."

You do have to trust your vendor. This is one of the reasons that the big brand names are able to charge such a premium – if you buy a genuine Cartier watch, you can be confident that it has a genuine Cartier mechanism. If you find a 'bargain' Cartier watch in a Shanghai market, you can be pretty confident that it does not.

"We have to be totally upfront with customers," says Vinod. "We start with some design sketches – which we do charge for – and a quotation. The design cost is then absorbed into the cost of the piece if the purchase goes ahead. There are methods we can use to keep a piece within budget: opting for different stones, for example, can keep the cost down without substantially changing the result. If there is genuinely no prospect of producing what customers want at their price-point, we'll guide them in the right direction. Once a design is agreed, it usually takes four-to-six weeks for a piece to be finished."

The Jewel Box is one of the most trusted jewellers for the expat community, and plays a valuable role in providing jewellery for charity events, photo shoots and fashion shows. Its gallery in the Shaw Centre carries both a regular collection and a fashion collection – currently hot are traditional Indian and Moghul designs. You can visit them at #25-04 Shaw Centre; it is better to first call 6733 4100 for an appointment.

