

Zooming In On Design

In order to adapt how they design during the pandemic, these jewellery designers turned to Zoom in order to bring custom pieces to life

Words by **Smitha Sadanandan**

In a world where laptops and smartphones have transformed into hangouts for social and work gatherings, many jewellery designers stepped up to connect with clients near and far. Despite quarantine sessions and several months of lockdown impacting life and work, designers continued with their jobs through virtual calls via Zoom and WhatsApp, as well as occasional in-person meetings, when possible.

With virtual consultations and the reality of life under lockdown, these jewellery designers share memorable experiences as the pandemic forced them to get creative digitally.



White gold band with 2ct brilliant-cut round diamond

Harvey Owen

Thanks to a digital world, Hallam Harvey and Owen Bather, founders of fine jewellery brand Harvey Owen, stayed busy doing what they love: Designing commitment rings for all genders.

One of their clients, Anthony, spotted their classic Heath ring on the brand's Instagram account and reached out. The creative brief was simple: Anthony wanted to marry the Heath design with a "beautiful, sentimental two-carat brilliant-cut round diamond" that he inherited from his late grandfather. Anthony had a strong emotional connection to the old ring and knew he had to use it to propose to his partner. After a few email exchanges, they gathered on Zoom to discuss the design a little further. "We like to put a face to the name when we are designing a bespoke piece. It is such a personal journey," says Hallam. The initial consultation took place in August and the duo was able to ship the finished custom engagement ring to the client at the end of October. The simple, highly polished chamfered white gold band set with the solitaire has six talon claws that gives the illusion of a hexagon.

Another commitment ring recently designed by the team was "completely bespoke." The client, Daniel, wanted to propose to his partner in December 2020. That meant the duo had to work quickly to meet the deadline. At that time, however, London was still under lockdown. "We felt that by having a face-to-face talk, we would get a lot more details from the client about what they like and dislike. As we couldn't meet Daniel in person, a virtual call on Zoom was the next best thing," says Hallam. The design brief from Daniel was quite open; he had done his research online and zeroed in on platinum and white diamonds. He was also drawn to rings with a halo of diamonds – and his fiancé-to-be wore mainly white metal. Platinum it was and a single halo to add extra sparkle to Daniel's commitment ring, the diamond sprinkled shank – similar to the Harvey Owen signature Tate rings – tapered ever so slightly to elevate the 0.75 carat oval diamond. The central diamond, held by six talon claws, seamlessly disappear into the diamond facets.

harveyowen.com

Studio Renn

The pause that the pandemic forced us all into made people realise what is most important; they now have the time to look, listen and talk – and think, observe Rahul and Roshni Jhaveri, founders of Studio Renn.

“One of the most gratifying custom pieces we did last year was for a collector from London – someone we had never met,” shares the duo helming the Mumbai-based jewellery brand. The client and her husband wanted the Studio to source a two-carat diamond and design a ring around it. The design brief also came with an interesting backstory. “They had gotten engaged in 2017, but on the day of the proposal, she lost her ring. After that, they never had a ring made – she didn’t even wear a wedding band. The engagement ring commissioned was meant to ‘replace’ the original one.” The narrative reminded Rahul of a poem he had written in 2013 titled ‘Lost and Found’ – and that lent itself conceptually to the work.

The discussion was entirely done over Zoom video calls, combined with



Lost and Found ring

“The creative process was fluid up until the ring was ready. It was interesting to get to know someone for the first time over Zoom.”

WhatsApp message exchanges and detailed e-mails during the lockdown. “The creative process was fluid up until the ring was ready. It was interesting to get to know someone for the first time over Zoom”, muses Rahul. Rahul and Roshni compensated for the absence of an in-person consultation by sharing more sketches, videos, and prototypes. Together, they explored multiple stones and went through design iterations and evolutions. Ultimately, it all boiled down to “the trust” they forged across digital interactions and deep discussions. The Lost and Found ring – an evolution of the Studio’s Boletus SP line – employs an organic form holding the diamond in a seemingly precarious way. If one ‘finger’ were to let go of the grip, the diamond would fall off – or so it seemed. Once the ring was created, the couple had the designers engrave the date when the original ring was lost. “It is the narratives around the ‘Lost and Found’ ring that made it unique, meaningful, and purposeful,” adds Rahul.

studiorenn.com

Shimell & Madden

Londoners Emma Madden and Luke Shimell have been creating bespoke geometric pieces for clients based all over the world. In the last few years, they have done this primarily by e-mail – sending designs and videos of gemstones and jewellery. Though the duo has been quite accustomed to the process of not physically meeting or even seeing their clients, creating a special one-of-a-kind piece, especially for someone who had never seen or tried on a piece of their jewellery before, was still challenging.

“For this to work, you have to be able to present and describe your designs and gemstones clearly and accurately. We provide images of the production process along with the final piece, which our clients really love to have; especially if they have not been able to visit our studio,” explains Emma. The pair also made quite a few alternative engagement rings last year, among them a bespoke Diamond Parallel Three Stone Ring with an emerald-cut white diamond and baguette-cut yellow sapphire side stones. For this piece, the clients first selected a few initial ideas from the Shimell & Madden core collection. Then, the designers put together a document of the styles with the particular gemstone colours the clients liked.



Diamond Parallel Three Stone ring

“Both parties were involved in the design process and ended up deciding on a three stone ring in the style of our Parallel Collection,” says Emma. The clients were keen on seeing a few colour combinations of gemstones and the designers put together some loose gemstone options and provided illustrations of what the gems would look like in the final design. Luke and Emma were also able to show the stones virtually. What’s more, they had become quite used to illustrating their designs using Photoshop, so the rings were almost identical to the final handmade piece. Their mathematical exploration of line and layering, alongside delicate texturing, ensure they have yet another happy client.

shimellandmadden.com

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Kendra Pariseault diamond ring

Kendra Pariseault

Designer Kendra Pariseault has been meeting clients virtually long before the pandemic changed lives. She has a particularly detailed process that enables her clients to understand the stone they are looking to purchase even without seeing it in person. For each virtual session, she walks the client through the details and characteristics of each stone, while simultaneously providing her opinion.

“My eyes and opinion are what drives each of my client’s purchase. I’m grateful that I have the trust of so many new and loyal customers, it’s a privilege to be able to do something you love every day, even remotely,” says Kendra. “I love creating custom pieces for clients because I get so inspired by their vision and I love to incorporate their ideas with my own.”

She typically starts the design conversation by asking a little bit about the couple, their hobbies, and career. “The stone is where the process truly begins – I work very closely with the client to select the perfect piece, which can easily take a week to six months

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to identify. But once that’s selected, the design and collaborative process truly unfolds on its own.” Reviewing stones and ring designs then spill over multiple e-mail exchanges and video call conversations. “Even when done remotely, creating a custom piece is still a very intimate process,” she adds. Kendra also observes that the “remote design process” tends to be “more personal” owing to uninterrupted communication.

kendrapariseaultjewelry.com

Marcia Budet

In early January, Puerto Rican designer Marcia Budet was commissioned to design engagement rings and wedding bands for siblings who hailed from her native country. As Nicole and Jacqueline had strong preferences for their individual rings, Marcia relied on a hybrid of virtual and in-person meetings (post-lockdown).

“I loved every minute of it. I designed Nicole’s ring before the pandemic started and wanted Jacqueline to have a similar experience,” adds the New York-based jeweller, who is known for her architectural pieces that defy trends. “Since Jacqueline and I lived in different parts of the world at the time, and we were in the middle of a pandemic, I organised our first meeting virtually. We initially discussed elements that she wanted to incorporate into her ring – the style, design vibe, and the main stone shapes and types.”

Marcia then shared images and references for specific styles from her collection and later met with Nicole and Jacqueline to show them the diamonds. Nicole wanted different diamond shapes in a versatile stack of rings and a mix of metals and textures. The white and yellow gold, contrasted with polished and brushed finishes, as well as smaller marquise accent diamond and round



White gold engagement ring with diamonds and alexandrite

diamonds, completed Nicole’s pear-cut diamond engagement ring and wedding band stack.

Meanwhile, Jacqueline gravitated toward an East-West marquise setting. “She wanted a low-profile design; a two-piece set with a classic vibe and unique design elements,” adds Marcia. While oval and pear-shaped diamonds fascinated Jacqueline, she craved for a splash of colour. The gorgeous alexandrite – a gem noted for its unusual light-absorbing properties – held huge appeal. Jacqueline, a tad unsure if she wanted the alexandrite to take centre-stage, fell in love with an oval diamond that Marcia had sourced for her ring. So, the engagement ring incorporated smaller alexandrite gems for colour, while the matching white gold band was set with pear-cut and round diamonds to resemble the infinity sign.

With the onset of the pandemic, clients have significantly more time on their hands to educate themselves and are therefore more decisive – and that, says Marcia, is a great thing for jewellers like her who design custom pieces. ✨

marciabudet.com



White and yellow gold engagement ring with pear-cut diamond