These Stores are Cool

BIG COOL NO. 1
GROGAN JEWELERS

BIG COOL NO. 2
G. THRAPP JEWELERS

BIG COOL NO. 3
MERVIS DIAMOND IMPORTERS

BIG COOL NO. 4
FELDMAR WATCH COMPANY

BIG COOL NO. 5
THE WEDDING RING SHOP

SMALL COOL NO. 1
ALCHEMY

SMALL COOL NO. 2
KELLY MITCHELL

SMALL COOL NO. 3
BRUNO FINE JEWELERS

SMALL COOL NO. 4
GEM JEWELRY BOUTIQUE

SMALL COOL NO. 5
ARTFUL EYE JEWELRY DESIGN CENTER

America's Coolest Stores 2014 Winners

Jay Klos of Grogan Jewelers and Laura Mapes and David Iler of Alchemy
One thing’s for sure: Larry Bruno’s decision to build a destination store in Northwestern Pennsylvania has left him with an endless supply of interesting and unlikely stories to share with customers.

When Bruno thought about having a destination store, he had not really imagined being off the beaten path. But when his real estate agent found him seven acres in the middle of nowhere he was intrigued. “He said, ‘Larry, how would you like to have a waterfall?’ I was shocked. I didn’t know about this waterfall. I lived on the other side of the county,” Bruno recalls.

Often Larry’s wife, Linda, looks at him like he’s nuts when he proposes an offbeat scheme, but this time she was as enchanted as he with the waterfall on seven acres. “Funny enough, she liked the plan, too,” Larry says. “We’re cut from the same cloth. She said, ‘That looks wonderful,’ and so, she was on board.”

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He knew all along what he didn’t want. He’d already had that. “From very early on in the business, I thought jewelry stores were the same old thing,” Bruno says. “If they were downtown locations, they all looked the same. If they were in strip plazas, they all looked the same.”
Bruno studied at Bowman Technical School in Lancaster, PA, learning jewelry repair, stone setting and hand engraving in the ’70s. He worked as an apprentice, graduated to his own trade shop and opened his first jewelry store in 1981 in Hermitage, PA. After the demise of the steel mills in Western Pennsylvania decimated the local economy, he began thinking he needed more of a regional store.

He admits to some apprehension about buying the land, but the plan wasn’t as outlandish as it first seemed. Although the property is off the main road, it is just a couple of miles from Grove City Outlet Mall, which attracts 6 to 8 million visitors annually, many of them from Toronto, Canada. There are also three highly regarded restaurants in the neighborhood. His store is between the mall and the restaurants.

Bruno soon found out his property has more than a waterfall on it. It is the site of the Historic Springfield Iron Furnace, which operated from 1837 to 1862.

John White, a professor from Youngstown State University in Youngstown, OH, proposed excavating the historical iron furnace he knew was buried on Bruno’s newly purchased land. Although some friends and advisers thought the decision was ill-advised, Bruno was so curious about the project that he not only agreed to allow the dig, but he joined the excavation team in 2007 before the store was built, helping haul rocks two days a week — work he describes as brutal. “You couldn’t hire someone to do that,” he says. The dig continues even now, and Bruno thinks it’s good for business.

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overlook the waterfall, he had recently seen a documentary about Frank Lloyd Wright and so was interested in having the store blend organically with the natural environment and not stand out like “a shiny new penny.” He incorporated stone from the furnace found in the dig that was originally quarried from the property. He also knew he wanted to open up the store with windows looking out onto the waterfall. “Jewelry stores can be stuffy and intimidating. People tend to get funny — nervous or apprehensive,” Bruno says. “Nature can take some of that away, and this view is beautiful. I felt it would create a unique experience.” “When people open those doors, they do say ‘Wow,’” Bruno says. “They are blown away by the view. I was a little bit worried that they would just go to the windows, overlooking the waterfall, but they do stay inside and enjoy the store.”
Andrew McQuilken: Take the classic high-end jewelry gallery and drop it into the heart of nature. I feel as if I have been invited into their living room, with the benefit of spectacular woodland views.

Cindy Edelstein: Of course the location is the most outstanding feature but it truly makes it special to the clients the events and engagement photos are a green idea. Taking a feature and turning it into a green event is what good marketing is all about.

Danielle Miele: I’ve never met a jewelry store where you can buy engagement rings and feel like you should have your wedding in site because it’s so beautiful! The waterfall really sets this jewelry store apart.

Leslie McGwire: The architecture of the building is warm and inviting for the clients. The use of natural features inside and out helps with the overall environment with the focus on the history of the area and the waterfall.

David Geller: The interior is beautiful and overlooking nature and the waterfall is wonderful. The story is great, and I love the look of the store. The focal points are the windows that look out to nature and the pine fireplace mantel, to nature and the pine fireplace mantel.

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