

Burmese sapphire and diamond ring set with yellow gold prongs and surrounded by circular cut diamonds, from Van Cleef & Arpels and available at Betteridge; below right, inside the new Betteridge location.



'70s pioneers launched Vail as world-class jewelry destination

◆ Vail didn't lure hardy pioneers with a hankering for gold and silver in the 1800s. But a century later, it attracted other young adventurers with a passion for precious metals: In the 1970s, a dynamic core of jewelers infused the new town with their original designs. Today, they help maintain Vail's worldwide reputation for distinctive jewelry.

About five stores established the landscape for the 15 jewelers the Vail Valley now supports. The earliest entrepreneurs, Jim Cotter and Dan Telleen, began in 1970. "Vail was a town where, if you had an idea, you could make it happen," Telleen said.

The sophistication of Vail's clientele allows Cotter's

imagination to run wild at J. Cotter Gallery. He drops diamonds into concrete settings and fashions rings from feathered masks. At Karats, Telleen incorporates meteorites, arrowheads and rare Roman coins into jewelry.

In the '70s, each store found its niche. The Golden Bear gave Vail its iconic symbol in 1975. The fetish bear's popularity is just one example of how visitors love bringing Vail memories home in the form of gems.

In 1976, Patti and John Cogswell brought handcrafted Native American jewelry from reservations when they opened The Squash Blossom. Since then,

they've expanded to include top international designers.

Rob and Barb De Luca opened Currents in 1977 to fill the need for fine watches and more classic jewelry. Like Cotter and Telleen, Barb De Luca creates custom pieces. Rob De Luca describes Vail's jewelry stores as "anchor points" for frequent visitors who stop by to catch up on news and gossip. Or, in the case of fine jeweler Betteridge's new Solaris location, to chat over a glass of wine at the classy bar in back. This trust, as well as quality and innovation, has elevated Vail to world-class status when it comes to purchasing timeless jewelry.

—Kimberly Nicoletti



MUST-SEE MOUNTAIN GEMS ACROSS THE HIGH-COUNTRY:

Vail

J. Cotter Gallery: U.S. and European artists' contemporary pieces; Cotter's cutting-edge designs (also in Beaver Creek). jcottergallery.com

Karats: A working studio and gallery; free-form designs with evolutionary themes. karatsvail.com

The Golden Bear: "The official symbol of Vail." thegoldenbear.com

Currents: Custom-made, classic fine jewelry and European watches. currentsfinejewelers.com

The Squash Blossom: Native American and top international designers. squashblossom.com

Betteridge: A historic, fine jeweler; estate and designer pieces; watches. betteridge.com

Breckenridge

Firenze Fine Jewelry and Appraisal: Mountain and snowflake pendants, vintage pieces. firenzefinejewelry.com

Matheu's Fine Watches & Jewelry: Mountain-inspired and name-brand jewelry. matheusfinewatches.com

Northstar

Coeur de Lion: Intricate designs inspired by mythology and history. rampantlioncollections.com

South Lake Tahoe

Poe Rava Gem Company & The Black Pearl Gallery: Custom gold, precious and semi-precious stone jewelry. 530-541-2555.

