

Air of Elegance

An old-school jeweler updates its image with striking new design

CALL IT TRUE SYNERGY: Combining old-school business ethics and 90 years of tradition with a modern, elegant renovation and the addition of new, cutting-edge designers, Elleard Heffern Fine Jewelers has incorporated the best of its past with a strong sense of the future.

Located on the lobby floor of a high-rise office building in a business hub right outside of St. Louis, even the store itself is a hybrid of the appointment-only business it used to be and the inviting, approachable retailer it is today. Attracting discerning professionals, business travelers and upscale suburbanites who often become repeat customers, Heffern has quietly specialized in the finest and most unique jewelry designs for decades, but their latest remodeling — which cost in the low six figures and coincided with a new brand identity campaign — has created a modern yet elegant look that matches the latest contemporary, less-formal merchandise they have added to their mix.



THE HISTORY SERVICE FIRST

Christopher "Kit" Heffern's grandfather, Samuel E. Heffern, founded

the family business with his uncle, George L. Neuhoff, Jr., in 1913 in an office suite of a St. Louis office building. Almost no jewelry was displayed in the space — instead, pieces were brought out individually based on each client's request. They catered to selective, hand-picked customers and were well-known for closing deals on the finest gems and precious metals using only a handshake. They also formed a reputation of forging connections with soon-to-be famous jewelry designers, including Oscar Heymann, who started his business around the same time. In the early 1950's, Kit's father, Elleard Heffern, bought out the



Neuhoffs, and in 1972 the business relocated to the 18th floor of a high-rise building in Clayton, a suburb just west of St. Louis, where it remained until 1990 when they moved down to their current location. While Kit grew up in a jewelry family, he did not get involved in the Heffern's business until 1972, after he had completed college — in fact, he graduated from Tufts with a degree in electrical engineering and is the only one of Elleard's five chil-

dren that eventually joined the jewelry world. "It was a passion for business that drew me into it," says Heffern, "but I grew to have a real passion for jewelry, for gemstones, for the people, for everything about the industry."

THE CONCEPT MORE VISIBILITY

Elleard Heffern Fine Jewelers has never had a traditional retail storefront, whether in a mall, shopping center or a free-standing building. Instead, it built its business as a by-appointment office, where clients could come in to privately experience the best of personal service. For the first time in their history, the lobby-area store offers more visibility and includes front doors

COOL DETAILS

Elleard Heffern Fine Jewelers

ADDRESS: 101 S. Hanley Road, Suite 110, Clayton, MO, 63105

PHONE: (314) 863-8820

URL: www.heffern.com

YEAR FOUNDED: 1913

STORE AREA: 2,500 sq. ft

LAST REMODEL: 2004

OWNER: Christopher "Kit" Heffern



made of floor-to-ceiling glass, exterior signage and jewelry displays for passersby to view. "The way people shop now is very different," says Heffern. "Now people like to browse." But for security, the front doors are still kept locked, and customers are personally greeted and led in by a salesperson.

"I think we have the best of both worlds," says marketing director and CGA sales associate Anne Pokoski. "Since we're off the beaten track, when customers walk in we know they're serious and didn't just accidentally end up at our front door." But, she adds, there is also heightened awareness, increased traffic and a chance for potential clients to look around. And friendly, personal service is still the name of the game, with each sales associate bringing their own expertise into the mix. The staff does not work on commission, which Pokoski says fosters a strong team mentality and a sense of community. "We'll all do any-

thing we can to assist each other in creating a successful sale, which is quite wonderful - it's a very cohesive group."

The remodeling of the store developed out of efforts to establish a new brand identity for Elleard Heffern and attract a younger but still affluent customer. Focus groups told them that customers wanted more seating, full-length mirrors, natural light and increased hospitality and comfort. The

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merchandise has also shifted since the renovations, to reflect the idea of a more casual approach to luxury than in the past, and features less formal designs with a lighter feel as well as an increase in platinum and white gold. New designers added to the mix include Vera



Wang, Seidengang, Laura Gibson and Yossi Harari, alongside classics such as Oscar Heymann, Michael Good, Jean Francois Albert and Michael Bondanza.

**THE STORE
AIR OF ELEGANCE**

The lobby area is a two-story space, and the soaring ceiling is a centerpiece of the store's open, airy environment - but it was also a challenge to the designer, Sasha Malinich, who had been recommended to Heffern and had completed many upscale retail spaces in and around St. Louis. "We have a two-story wall with natural daylight pouring in for half the day but gone for the other half," says Pokoski. "And for halogen and fluorescent lighting, you're



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dealing with 20 feet rather than just a one-story ceiling.”

After entering through the glass doors, customers pass through a beautiful entryway featuring a deep padded suede vitrine window display with rough, unfinished stone surrounding it, and an Italian lighting fixture in an abstract seashell shape that offers a sense of modern, quiet luxury.

The store's relaxed, elegant interior features leather padded, buttery-colored walls that match the set of contemporary leather club chairs at the front of the store. The cushy textures are echoed throughout the space, though simple Italian metal chairs are used for some of the four seating areas. Other walls are painted a warm almond color, and dividers between the sales floor and the store's offices are glass panels with pale green linen fabric imbedded between the panes, creating an opportunity for soft, textural light to shine through.

The two-story glass windows look out onto the exterior of the building, which is completely landscaped with tulips and seasonal flowers, and a nearby large column is finished and painted a clay color, creating a sense of airiness and verticality. Previously, that area had been blocked off, but both Heffern and Malinich decided to take the wall down and



expose the natural light. “It’s a dramatic improvement,” says Heffern, who says clients enjoy seeing the jewelry in the daylight. “Clients like it; I think it increases their comfort level.”

The mostly dark brown and buff colors of the store, as suggested by Malinich, are meant to complement the jewelry without overwhelming it. “The space is already quite dramatic, so we wanted interesting elements without competing with the jewelry,” says Pokoski.

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Malinich also brought in wonderfully modern chandeliers that look like tumbleweeds, adding an enchanting lightness to the space, says Heffern: “When the heating and air is blowing they turn and twist ever so slightly, casting interesting light patterns.”

With mostly jewelry and glass taking up the wall space in showcases and dividers, there was only one space calling for a piece of fine art, says Pokoski. “We

have a contemporary collage by a St. Louis artist named James M. Smith. It’s very vibrant and one of the only true color areas in the space. It’s the perfect accent.”

The store’s showcases are all wood, painted a dark-brown, almost black finish and the entire space is carpeted, mostly in a neutral, low-pile. “It’s very sleek and understated, and perhaps unremarkable, but we didn’t want the showcases — or the floor — to be the star,” says Pokoski. “Jewelry is the star in our store.”

A private salon features a Knoll tulip table that has been with the store since the 1960’s, covered in an ultra suede top. “It features traditional seating around a round table, so that if we’re doing a large estate appraisal with 50 or more pieces of jewelry we can work comfortably,” says Pokoski. “It’s also just another option to offer a client who wants to shop privately.” The salon also has a full-length mirror, family photos and an extensive library of books about jewelry.

The response to the remodeling has been overwhelmingly enthusiastic. “People are always discovering something new they didn’t notice before,” says Heffern.

THE TECHNOLOGY ALL THE RIGHT TOOLS

With a strong history of custom

design, the store is one of the first jewelers in St. Louis to have a laser welder onsite, says Heffern. The private offices have computers which sales associates often use to look up ideas for jewelry, and all sales and inventory are computerized. While the idea of having a plasma screen in the store was discussed at length, it was finally decided that there wasn’t room. “We simply don’t have the wall space,” says Pakowski.

THE PEOPLE ‘NO FUDGING’

Heffern believes strongly in personal service and excellent follow-up which he instills in his nine employees (six of whom are sales associates). “All of them are very professional, very knowledgeable and very caring,” he says. There are three certified gemologist appraisers among the staff, as well as two graduate gemologists. “They all love jewelry,” says Heffern. “I believe you have to love what you’re doing. If it’s just a job, you don’t have the same level of enthusiasm.” And honesty is the only policy at Elleard Heffern, he adds: “The most important thing is that whenever you wait on a client, what you tell them is the way it is, don’t fudge things for sake of presentation,” he says. “Be gracious and honest and at the end of the day it’s about making the client happy with whatever the purchase is, whether it’s a lot of money or not as much.”