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Virginia Living blog

Ace Hotel, NYC

This Week in Virginia – August 31

Cuffs Complement Fall Fashions

Discover the deep-down elegance of the ancient art of Repoussé

BY JENNIFER PULLINGER

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The classics are back. The fall fashion forecast calls for capes, wraps, and blazers to make their return to street wear, as well as the LBD (little black dress), chunky Nordic knits, and Mad Men-inspired silhouettes like pencil skirts and kitten heels – plus lots and lots of plaid and neutral hues in camel and army green. Words like “utilitarian,” “conservative,” and “minimalist” have all been used to describe this season, all the better to highlight the ultimate classic statement accessory – the cuff.



American Estate Sterling Cuff Collection

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Much like this season, the style-conscious often look to the past for inspiration, which is what Carolyn O’Keefe did when she decided to create the American Estate Sterling Cuff Collection, available at Jack Kreuter Jewelers in Richmond’s River Road Shopping Center (6231 River Road) this fall. O’Keefe’s cuffs are designed using old world Repoussé and hand-chasing metal-working techniques, where ornamentation is first hammered in relief from the reverse side and then refined on the front – a complex, time-consuming process that has been around for centuries.

The collection consists of one equestrian-themed and six different floral-motif sterling silver cuffs lined in gold (prices range from \$550 to \$695).

O’Keefe’s cuff collection transcends seasonal trends; she describes them as heirloom pieces meant to be passed down for generations. Virginia Living asked this Baltimore native and University of Virginia alumna about the collection’s origins and why Virginia women in particular will clamor for her cuffs.

What inspired you to create this collection?

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My mother Sally, who grew up in a house called Tanglewood in Front Royal (now a bed and breakfast), wore an estate sterling cuff she inherited from her grandmother. Mom was a vibrant, warm woman who would instinctively toss her cuff on her wrist every day to go to work, for cocktails, and on the weekends — every occasion. I loved the fact that that's all it took to finish her look. I researched estate sales, antique stores, and the Internet to find elegant distinctive sterling cuffs and couldn't find ones with enough detail or presence.

Out of all the ways to design jewelry, why the Repoussé technique?

That's easy. I grew up in Baltimore, the home of Stieff Silver Company, and we used Stieff Rose flatware sterling everyday (except for some breakfasts – eggs tarnish silver!). Even as a kid, I'd look carefully at the beauty and sculptural quality of those forks and spoons. Fast forward, when I was seeking cuffs like my mom's, I called Jim Stieff and asked if he had any cuff molds from the old days. He said, well, actually there are only one or two Stieff designs and he admitted that they didn't really fit very well for the modern woman. But then he mused – there may be something better.

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