

Cornelis Hollander in the Japanese Scene



By RaeAnne Marsh

Cornelis Hollander with customer in Tokyo, Japan

Exporting creativity to Japan? “That’s not the usual way; most people buy from Japan,” observes Cornelis Hollander with a wryly self-conscious smile.

But selling his jewelry designs to customers in Japan – actually having a presence in Japan – is exactly what the award-winning jewelry designer has been doing for fifteen years.

There’s a Swiss connection to the story; it starts with Hollander showing his designs at the international Basel Fair in Switzerland, at which the Japanese distributors ignored him the first year. But the next year was a different story, as they had had the first year to meet and learn about him. “I think what attracted them was the simplicity of the designs,” he explains, noting that Japanese designers favor more intricate designs, so his were very different.

So, with a firm grasp of a grand total of five Japanese words, Hollander began the relationship that sees him regularly traveling to Japan. In spite of the 20-hour travel time that includes layovers and bus shuttles, he

enjoys the visits.

It’s a different way of doing business. Hollander has two stores here in Scottsdale – one on Marshall Way in downtown Scottsdale and another on Scottsdale Road in north Scottsdale – but in Japan, he sells in much more of a party atmosphere.

Hollander does not sell directly to the public in Japan. “I sell through the distributor to the public,” he says. The distributor makes all the arrangements to hold the show in a five-star hotel and invites 200 of his best retail stores. The retail store owners each bring ten of their best customers. “They’re wine and dined and entertained. Then they go shopping for jewelry.” Hollander describes the events as very colorful, with the rooms filled with thousands of flowers. It’s definitely a dress-up affair, and Hollander gets celebrity treatment: He finds the customers eager to interact with him as one interacts with an artist at an art gallery. “They want to have their picture taken with me,” he shares. “And they want me to sign the picture.”

Hollander is the only American invited to participate in these Japanese shows, but

not the only westerner. Other designers who have been invited come from Italy, Germany and Spain. Japanese designers he has gotten to know and admire include Nobuko Ishikawa, Yukiko Hanai, Mitsuo Kaji, Kimio Sakai and Takemoto Izumi – who shows his designs here – but he says communication “is very difficult.” Although the Japanese have studied English and can speak it, Hollander finds they are shy about doing so.

Thirteen years ago, Hollander welcomed Nobuko Okuni to his company as Japanese Marketing Director. She now shares the load of attending the Japanese shows, and Hollander attends only the large ones, in Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya. “After recovering from the flight” – a day – “I really enjoy it.” Some of the fun is the food, cooked teppanyaki-style on little stoves at your table, but another part of it is the people themselves.

“The Japanese are very honorable. I always get paid; there is no need to chase them to get paid.” An important consideration from half a world away. And, when there, he travels with his jewelry in a backpack – no



Nobuko Okuni, (left, on horseback) is the Cornelis Hollander Japanese Marketing Director. She treats a Japanese jewelry client to an Old West experience — Scottsdale style.

Brinks-style security, as he uses here. “I am totally not scared in Japan to travel with a bag of jewelry.”

Negotiations, though, can be much more drawn out than the business transactions here at home. It’s a difference for which Hollander expresses great respect as he explains, “Negotiating is lengthy, because they never say, ‘No.’” It has to be inferred, eventually.

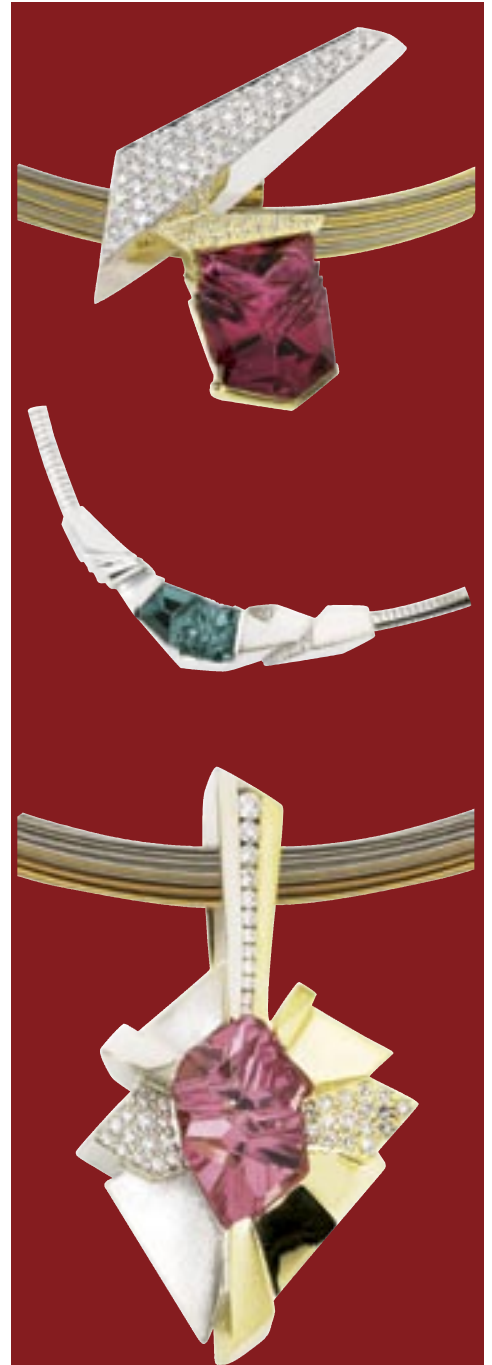
For the most part, the jewelry Hollander takes to Japan is the same designs he sells here, but from time to time, “I’ll design a small collection for the Japanese only.” The designs of his that are most popular with the Japanese are playful and colorful, and he finds the colored stones have the greatest appeal. “Tourmalines, pinks, yellow, the softer colors of stones.” And the paraiba, his personal favorite. Not all of his Japanese

customers are wealthy, he notes, but they are extremely loyal. “They’ll buy a little piece, and tell me, ‘It’s good seeing you. Thank you for coming.’” He’s filled specialty orders, such as a kimono belt, and introduced the very Western bolo tie to great success.

And sometimes Hollander gets to welcome his Japanese customers to Arizona. “We keep in touch,” he explains. When they visit, he is able to share with them traditional Western activities. He takes them horseback riding, and invites them to a backyard barbecue at his house.

Then they do what they traveled 20 hours for. “They come to my store the next day to buy.” ■

Cornelis Hollander
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See inside front cover and page 69



Cornelis Hollander is world renowned for his award-winning jewelry. Displayed here are stunning slide pendants and artistically unique rings.