NEWS RELEASE

Crafting Cultural Identity Through Jewelry: A Q&A with Dorian Webb

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Editor's Note: This is the first of a two-part series exploring the influences, meaning and future of Black culture in jewelry design. See part two, a Q&A with Malyia McNaughton, Founder and CEO of Made by Malyia and Co-Founder and current Board President of the Black In Jewelry Coalition (BIJC).

At its core, jewelry expresses something. Each ring, necklace, bracelet, brooch or piercing holds unique meaning for the wearer, the designer and those who look upon it.

For Black communities, jewelry's meaning runs deep. Throughout history, jewelry has served as a powerful symbol of cultural identity, resilience, and self-expression. As we celebrate Black History Month, we're examining the profound influence of Black culture on jewelry design, what it means for today's consumer and the roadmap toward a more inclusive, diverse jewelry industry.

We caught up with **Dorian Webb**, an acclaimed jeweler and designer who founded her own business, to learn what influences her work and how she envisions a more inclusive jewelry industry. Dorian also shared her perspective on the intricate ways Black values, traditions, and narratives are woven into the art of jewelry design.

Q: How does Black culture and heritage influence your designs?

> Dorian: I rarely design pieces that are symmetrical. Things are breaking planes, interrupting patterns and creating multiple levels of interest and activity. I think this often reflects back to my African American heritage. Black Americans are known for taking little bits of various things, putting them together in ways that are different and exuberant, and creating something new and reflective of our heritage of synthetization.

Q: As an artist who designs jewelry, what makes jewelry a unique format to design for?

> Dorian: Jewelry is a marking of place. It expresses who you are. It expresses joy and pride. In the African American community, there's a love of something that's a bit extra – something that's celebratory. Jewelry is unique because it expresses who the wearer is in a non-verbal, nonconfrontational way – it invites people in. Jewelry invites connection.

Unlike other art forms, jewelry's meaning is informed by the wearer. As a designer, you create things with an ideal customer in mind or to express a story or perspective. When people purchase a piece, it becomes their own – its meaning changes and adapts to the wearer.

Q: What's your advice for young people – especially aspiring Black designers/artists – interested in jewelry as a career path?

Dorian: I would encourage aspiring jewelers and designers to educate themselves on what's out there and what's been done before. When I started, there weren't many practicing African American jewelry designers getting press, being featured in the media, or being sold in major retailers. It's hard to imagine yourself doing something if you don't see a model you can follow.

Now that there are more African American jewelers out there pushing boundaries, I'd encourage anyone starting out to seek out today's jewelry designers and learn as much as they can. Take jewelry classes and understand how jewelry is made. Get your hands dirty! Aspiring jewelry designers can then figure out a way to add to that continuum and bring their heritage to their creations.

I think there's a need for various voices to be heard, and for those perspectives to be reflected in store offerings; consumers want to buy pieces that resonate with them. There's a market for an array of ideas.

Q: What does the future hold for jewelry design, and especially how Black culture, values, and leadership will play a pivotal role?

Dorian: In terms of the future, I think a measure of success for Black-owned businesses is how many go from being bespoke, craftsman-like, and entrepreneur-driven to being a business that survives and thrives beyond its founder.

Access to capital is key. Sufficient capital helps any business grow, scale, and survive another generation. Black women are the fastest-growing segment of entrepreneurs, and yet they receive less than .5% of all venture capital investments. That needs to change. We need Black-owned businesses to have the financial wherewithal to expand as they should, to be located in areas where their customer resides and have the marketing dollars to reach their customers.

Since the pandemic, I think people are being more intentional about seeking out African American businesses and supporting them. Consumers are seeing how their dollars can make a difference. Going forward, I hope more customers are part of the change they want to see.

We invite you to see more of **Dorian's beautiful jewelry on her website**.

Design innovation and inclusivity are at the heart of how we Inspire Love for All at Signet and bring consumer-inspired designs to life.

We do this in several ways, including co-developing Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) creative designers

and talent through scholarship, mentoring, and business development. Learn more in **our Corporate Sustainability Goals**.