

Terra-Cotta Hues Invite Indulgence in This Fine Jewelry Store

No doubt, jewelry shopping can be intimidating. Especially for big-ticket items. Take one scenario: Sales folks, sometimes with supercilious smiles, fixed behind a counter of precious baubles, sizing up the customers. A sense of ease and welcome? Rare. But Barbara Rourke and Jason St. John, cofounders of Bells + Whistles, the Los Angeles-based studio, broke the paradigm in Marrow Fine's third iteration in Chicago. Collaboration, however, between designers and owner Jillian Sassone dates back four years. That's when the team, upon a landlord's recommendation, created the first shop in San Diego, followed by one in Newport Beach, and then circled back to the original for a renovation. Each is unique; all are dramatic, which partially explains how Bells + Whistles—known for restaurant design, particularly San Diego's theatrical, Michelin-plate *Animae*—came to the Marrow Fine table. Ultimately, experiential is the key descriptor for all. "Marrow is all about storytelling and the feeling our clients have when they wear a special piece we've created for them," says Sassone, who designs all the jewelry with husband Tim. "How you feel in our space is an extension of what Marrow is at the core." For Chicago, "we wanted to create classic design, but wanted push the boundaries and play a little." Wow. "A mega client knowing the impact of design upon a brand," says Rourke.

"We blew up shapes and created changes of scale within a monochromatic setting," St. John cites the through-line for all the shops. For this one, a former men's clothing shop owned by Drake, the designers created a dusky, terra-cotta-toned envelope of mottled Venetian plaster anchored by terrazzo flooring "that will look incredible in five to 25 years from now in the same way I hope an emerald and diamond *toi et moi* ring has the staying power to be passed down as a treasured family heirloom," the owner continues. Meanwhile, the designers responded to a chunky column by creating two deep curved alcoves around it and filling the overall volume with shaped forms: orbs, ovals, niches, and tambours. Inspiration, of course, came from Chicago's renown as an outstanding city of architecture. Friezes and elements adorn buildings "100's of feet above the ground," Rourke cites the obvious.

Throughout the open, 1,115-square-foot interior, said shapes create an aura more akin to a luxe hotel lobby than retail setting. Varied seating vignettes offer options for clientele to sit, chill, and imbibe a flute of champagne with the staff while contemplating potential purchases. Opt for a tiered sofa upholstered in embossed velvet just past the entry. Or traverse the center to the opposite wood-framed settee flanked by recesses for plants. Another choice is chairs at the marble-topped console, the largest of four, fronting the scalloped, citron-toned display wall with built-in vitrines. For privacy, head to the rear where a secluded salon is situated. At Marrow Fine, the overarching idea is movement, transforming an often sterile and static experience into an embracing organic one. As for its savvy owner? If three jewel boxes were not enough, add her home in Rancho Mirage, California to the mix.