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MASTER JEWELER REDEFINES ART AND EXPERIENCE IN NEW WESTLAKE BOUTIQUE

AUSTIN, Texas (September 13, 2017) — The marks of the true artist, it's been said, are a clear perception and a firm, bold hand. Those indelible marks are superbly demonstrated in a new custom jewelry boutique that opened this week in Westlake. "Boutique," however, doesn't seem like the right word for this place, which is owned and operated by Christopher and Catie Franklin. One quick look around and it's clear that it merits a bolder, more imaginative moniker. There's a lot to absorb beyond those storefront doors (characters inside aside).

One half of the store, to the left, is defined by a wall of hand-cut and individually assembled pieces of wood that fade into a facade of brick. Rustic, rough-hewn shelves and display cases are supported by floor-to-ceiling steel pipes, which look like they lived past lives as drill strings or cattle guards. The accents are decidedly masculine: a sci-fi looking gold welder's mask, fur pelts, animal hides, newsboy and ivy hats, chunky watches and accessories.

The store's other half (some might call it the better half) presents an elegant contrast: it's almost-pristine white with lacy, shapely, filigreed accents and ornaments. Hand-crafted, one-of-a-kind pieces of furniture are arranged with clever displays for jewelry, boots and soon also custom apparel. They've designated two areas for gardening items and hand-blown glass pieces (the latter an exclusive deal with a Florida artist).

Even the lighting is purposeful — somewhat museum-like, and it creates a setting that beckons one not to see, but rather to behold, each piece. Perhaps more intriguing is the fact that everything in the store, including the displays and the wall designs, can be yours for a price. And those who appreciate that the value of a master's work isn't in his labor, but in his vision, will find those prices reasonable.

Rest assured that Christopher Franklin is indeed a master of his trade: his career as a jeweler and hand-craftsman spans 40 years, and his experience covers nearly every corner of the industry. He's had a lot of time to polish those traits and perfect his skills as a jeweler. His early years in the business were spent studying under German and Austrian artisans and working alongside highly regarded tradesmen and internationally known and respected diamond dealers. Then in 1981, Mr. Franklin opened his first store in Dallas, and in the years that followed, he steadily worked to build a sterling reputation as a custom jeweler. He went on to own and operate seven successful jewelry stores in Dallas and Austin, Texas; Denver, Colorado; and further afield in Florida. After that he tried his hand at retirement, but it wasn't a good fit.

"I got bored after screening the porch in, terracing the vegetable garden, re-landscaping the back yard and doing all the other stuff you don't have time for when you're running jewelry stores," Mr. Franklin said. He cleaned out his garage. Twice. He started working with leather. And building furniture. And making innovative garden pots.

(MORE)

“All during that time, people were always asking me to make custom jewelry pieces for them, or fix their watches. After 40 years you fix them in your sleep,” he said.

His wife and business partner Catie Franklin added, “One of my favorite things that he does is take heirloom jewelry or other estate pieces and redesign them to suit the more modern tastes of the next generations. He’s constantly pushing the boundaries of imagination and skill - he’s fearless that way. And he loves to apply some new innovative twist that’ll make the next project even better.”

Mr. Franklin agreed. “I might be old enough to retire, but I still crave learning new things and creating someone's dreams,” he said. So he quit retirement to build this new business — 12 Tables Jewelers — from scratch.

“This time I’m going to do a store that encompasses all the things I like to make and things I think are outstanding,” he said.

This will be his best and last adventure - which is saying a lot for a man who became the rightful king of jewelry and watch repair some decades ago, back in Dallas. Nobody could beat the speed, quality and price of his work, and his sterling reputation as a custom jeweler, horologist and craftsman remains untarnished.

Beyond skill and reputation, the man behind 12 Tables is also quite the character: a native Texan who speaks in plain terms and wickedly colorful analogies. You won’t find a more entertaining raconteur than this one. He’s a mix of hard work and perfectionism with hospitality and plain practicality, and his word is his honor — traits of a man raised on a West Texas ranch.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Mr. Franklin has developed a loyal following of clients who range from local patrons, art aficionados, collectors, globe-trotting enigmas and garden-variety celebrities. More than a few have claimed that he can make nearly any kind of jewelry, sculpture, furniture, apparel, accessory or interior design imaginable.

“When you have been doing this as long as I have, well...” (he pauses here, musing) “...when you can build a front door from scratch, or make a metal gate, or furniture, or make a leather jacket, or set a 22 ct. Marquee ... well I think that would be the guy I would go to for whatever I needed.”

Bold claims, indeed — but to see is to believe. And in the case of 12 Tables Jewelers, you’ve got to step inside this imaginative little shop to fully appreciate the vision and superb quality of Christopher Franklin’s work. There’s plenty to see and purchase aside from custom orders and repairs. Their goal is both a revolving and evolving inventory of all things trendy and beautiful, with something new to see each month.

Like most trips to seemingly far-fetched destinations, you’ll have to look pretty close to find 12 Tables. The store is discreetly nestled in the middle of a two-story stone building that seems to stand in odd perpendicularity to Bee Caves Road in Westlake. Once you find the right door and walk through it, though, you’ll likely see why folks say it’s worth the visit.

For more about 12 Tables Jewelers, visit their website (www.12tablesjewelers.com) or Facebook page (www.facebook.com/twelvetablesjewelers). Or call (512) 636-4301.