



Jennifer-Lynn Archuleta reached out to companies with multiple generations currently working together to find out about the challenges and joys of working with family.

A significant number of businesses around the world are family owned, or multigenerational, although there is no one definition for what constitutes a 'family' business. Any company in which two or more family members are involved, with the majority of ownership or control within a family, may be considered family run. According to a 2024 podcast by McKinsey and Company, such businesses contribute to more than seventy percent of global gross domestic product (GDP) and sixty percent of global employment. Family Business UK reported in 2023 that in the United Kingdom alone, family-owned businesses make up ninety percent of all private-sector firms and employ almost fourteen million people. Such businesses tend to be more resilient than non-family-owned companies and have a greater sense of responsibility towards their communities (Family Business UK, 2023; Carvalho, Leke and Vickery, 2024).

Representatives of these companies voice hopefulness about passing along traditions and hands-on knowledge to future generations; at the same time, conventional dynamics and gender roles in these companies are changing. The SC Johnson College of Business at Cornell University reported that almost 60 percent of all family businesses have women in executive positions. Further, almost one-third of such companies reported that the current leader's successor is female.

The gem and jewellery industry is a field wherein businesses are founded, maintained and passed on among multiple generations of the same family. We spoke to members of five companies in different areas of the industry to find out what it was like to work as part of a family-owned business in this niche trade. We found that these businesses reflected larger, general observations made about family-owned operations: many were founded or co-owned by women; they are concerned with ethical issues and responsible treatment of their communities; and they are hopeful about the companies they hope to hand off to future generations. We thank all of our participants for their time and enthusiasm.

ATELIER MUNSTEINER

Jutta Munsteiner,
Master Goldsmith and Designer
Philipp Munsteiner,
Journeyman Gem Cutter



A gem-cutting company established by Albert Munsteiner in 1898, Atelier Munsteiner was opened in Stipshausen, Germany, in 1973 by his grandson, Bernd Munsteiner. Jutta Munsteiner currently runs the business along with her son Philipp, the son of Tom Munsteiner and the grandson of Bernd Munsteiner and himself a prospective master gem cutter. Atelier Munsteiner primarily sells gemstones fashioned in a modern design in their in-house cutting shop; they also make jewellery from unique stones.

How long has your family been in the gem and jewellery trade? How long have you, personally, been involved?

JM: Albert Munsteiner began in the trade as a gem cutter in 1898. I joined the company in 1997, while Phillip began his work in the business four years ago, making him the fifth generation in the Munsteiner family of gemstone cutters.

Who are your customers? Why do you think they seek you out?

JM: Our customer base is made up of people who love art, gemstones and jewellery. We have many customers in the United States and Japan. People



Philipp Munsteiner's Griffin cut has been applied to this 53.68 ct citrine.



The Aurora ring, a collaboration between Jutta and Tom Munsteiner, uses 5.87 ct tanzanite, 2.65 ct tourmaline, 0.08 ct diamond and platinum.

seek us out because they are looking for a special gemstone or piece of jewellery that is made especially for them.

How do you think your status as a family-run/multigenerational business factors into your success?

JM: We are creative people who work together to create our enchanting cuts. We all share a great passion for gemstones. We have many friends in Brazil and in African countries, where we also buy rough stones. To work with this natural material is the greatest fulfilment for all of us.

We spoke to members of five companies in different areas of the industry to find out what it was like to work as part of a family-owned business in this niche trade.

PM: In 2015, I went to Brazil for the first time with my parents to buy rough stones. This was an unforgettable and important experience for me. Getting to know other cultures and countries is very exciting and inspiring for me.

What is your ten-year plan for yourself and your family from a business perspective?

JM: We want to develop many new ideas while keeping the tried-and-tested ones. The greatest success for us is the smile of our customers when they wear our jewellery.

PM: I feel confident about the future; I am looking forward to introducing people to my gemstones and my work.

What advice would you give to the next generation of your family (the one that is not involved in the business yet, but might become active when they are of age)?

JM: A positive attitude and putting your heart and soul into your hard work is a good recipe for a family business.

Always follow your heart, that will keep you on the right path. The joy of work and inspiration is the most important cornerstone.



The 10,363-ct Dom Pedro aquamarine (above), was created by third-generation gem carver Bernd Munsteiner. Photo by Donald E. Hurlbert, courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History. The Mantis (left), by his son Tom Munsteiner, uses a 1,066.55 ct citrine.

COLUMBIA GEM HOUSE

Natasha Braunwart, Brand & Corporate Social Responsibility Manager

Based in Vancouver, Washington (USA), Columbia Gem House was founded in 1975 by Eric Braunwart. It is staffed today by multiple generations of the Braunwart family, as well as close friends who are 'chosen family'. It is primarily a coloured gemstone cutting and wholesale business with a strong commitment to responsible sourcing. They also have a finished-jewellery manufacturing team at their Washington State headquarters. As part of their vision 'to create a world where responsibly sourced gems are the rule, not the exception', they have helped to redefine the standards by which coloured



Columbia Gem House's 'Team Tradeshow' includes family members and longtime friends of the Braunwarts. From left: Natasha Braunwart, Eric Braunwart, Mark Sprague, Pam Workman, Kathe Braunwart, Tod Braunwart and Joe Orlando.



Eric Braunwart, founder and president of Columbia Gem House, with his wife Kathe, the company's co-owner and jewellery designer.

gemstones are brought to market through the implementation of their in-house authored Fair Trade Gems Principles & Protocols.

How do you think your status as a family-run/multigenerational business factors into your success?

I believe we can make quicker decisions and fund projects that align with our mission and vision, even if they aren't always the most profitable choice. Our family-run dynamic enables us to approach decisions with a familial mindset rather than your typical business-transaction mindset. We prioritise this aspect over the bottom line. To us, it's more important to create an equitable supply chain and do something positive with our work than it is to make the most money. I can confidently say this perspective has been ingrained in me by my family, and I don't think it would be viable to operate or make decisions in this way in a corporate setting.

Are there specific challenges to working as a family that are specific to this niche field? Please explain what they are.

This is a fun question! I think lots of people assume I have the same 'brain' as my parents, and somehow all their knowledge has magically made its way into my head. If I am asked a question and I don't know the answer, I get a lot of weird looks. I don't think the typical 'let me find out and get back to you' is always accepted, because many assume I should just know the answer. This industry has traditionally been very opaque, and a lot of the knowledge and expertise can only be learned through experience, not necessarily through a formal education structure. My parents have been in this industry for fifty years; I've been in it for four percent of that time. So, I have some catching up to do if I want to uphold the reputation my parents have built.



Pomme Ruby, mined in keeping with Columbia Gem House's Fair Trade Gems Principles & Protocols, is found in a community of apple and rice farms in Madagascar. Pomme is the French word for apple, as well as the root word for apple in Malagasy.



A selection of rings from Columbia Gem House's Stackers collection.

“Our family-run dynamic enables us to approach decisions with a familial mindset rather than your typical business-transaction mindset. We prioritise this aspect over the bottom line.”

I think as the next generation coming into any family business, it can also be hard not to self-intimidate or put pressure on yourself to excel at everything in fear of disappointing your family or not living up to the expectations of your customers.

If you have a family business that started before your own generation, what challenges might exist for someone who would want to start a jewellery business that did not exist when your family's business started?

When my dad first started out, essentially every transaction or business relationship was done face-to-face. There was never a need for individual part numbers to upload to the web, let alone the need to have our gems viewable without us there to physically show them. That's something we are working through now – organising fifty years of inventory to be uploaded to the web. This is just one example that illustrates how my generation, growing up with the internet and cell phones, filters information through a very different lens.

What is your ten-year plan for yourself and your family from a business perspective?

While I know my dad will never fully step away from the business (he

just loves it too much), I would like to see the business adapt so he has the opportunity to only work on the 'fun' things that he wants to work on. Outside of that, my ten-year plan is to continue running the business under our Fair Trade Gems Principles & Protocols, evolving them as we grow, and to work with the rest of our team to capture their knowledge and expertise so the next generation can confidently learn their specialty and work to fill

their shoes as well. I also plan to get our entire inventory uploaded online, reintroduce our finished jewellery manufacturing and grow our team to continue building what my dad set out to do forty-eight years ago.

What advice would you give to the next generation of your family (the one that is not involved in the business yet, but might become active when they are of age)?

Come into the business when it's right for you. Don't do it for anyone else or on anyone else's timeline. Ask as many questions as you can and remember what it is that you bring to the table. Ask yourself how you can apply your skills to support the continued growth and adaptation of the business so it can evolve into something that you are proud of while still celebrating the legacy of where things started and who they started with. Don't lose sight of that.



Columbia Gem House is known for its gem-cutting work. Here, a 1.38 ct bicolour sapphire from Montana has been fashioned into a hexagonal cut.

DRUTIS JEWELLERY

Dana Drutis, Co-Founder

The motto of Drutis Jewellery, a mother-daughter team helming a Ukrainian brand with a Western presence, is "Jewellery that moves... You." They are very much a Ukrainian brand with a Western presence. Prior to the upscaling



Elena and Dana Drutis, the mother-daughter team behind Drutis Jewellery.

of the Russo-Ukrainian War, Elena Drutis lived in Odessa, Ukraine; her daughter, Dana Drutis, resided in London. Elena has since joined Dana in London. Their production proudly remains in Ukraine, with a strong and committed small team of jewellers, model makers, computer-aided designers and setters.

What is the mission of your family business?

To create jewellery that resonates with the creative streak in our customers' souls, that awes them and makes them feel like a kid again. While our pieces are not simple at all, we simply want to create jewellery that moves you, jewellery that moves, jewellery that creates joy for the wearer and jewellery that stands out.

Who are your customers? Why do you think they seek you out?

Our customer has no age restriction, which is something we have learnt first-hand in our business. They are

someone that appreciates something unique, doesn't chase after huge brand names for the sake of recognition. Rather, they choose something that is high quality, long lasting and timeless, but also creative, unusual and pushing the boundaries of what everyday jewellery should look like and do. They are excited by our jewellery that is more than meets the eye, that moves, transforms, carries meaning and functionality and makes them feel like an excited child.

How do you think your status as a family-run/multigenerational business factors into your success?

I consider us to be very much a young family-run business with huge amount of potential for growth, development and learning. I believe our biggest successes are still ahead of us. However, I would say that it's our unorthodox roots of not coming from a jewellery business background and not going through the formal route of jewellery education that makes us harsh judges of our own product.

Our familiarity with jewellery as a customer and our joint consumer lens makes us consciously choose to only produce unique one-of-a-kind jewellery that stands out in a world saturated with beautiful, well-crafted, high-end jewellery. We really felt like if we are going to do this we should produce something that has not been seen before! And that is what we still aim to achieve with every design, whether big or small.

Is there anything about being a family-run enterprise that you think would surprise our readers? Please share.

Honesty is key, and honesty runs through the veins of a family-run enterprise much more so than you would expect, versus a more classical business concept. If a piece doesn't inspire, awe and make us both giddy, it does not make it to production. We test — sense-test, practice-test, wear-test and pressure-test — our pieces until we are both thrilled with them. It is a high standard to live up to, but we are a biased mother-and-daughter duo.





Above: A selection of wearable kaleidoscopes from Drutis Jewellery. Left: The Cosmic Kaleidoscope — Starry Night kaleidoscope has stars (embedded with 0.12 ct diamond), moon and sun engravings on its 14K yellow-gold body, with sapphire adorning the sides. The colourful effect inside is created by ruby, fuchsite, blue sapphire, emerald and opal.

What is your ten-year plan for yourself and your family from a business perspective?

We do not aim to be something that everyone loves and wants. We are unique, we are unusual and funky and creative, and certainly not for everyone. We hope 'our' customers – described in an earlier answer – find us!



One of the kinetic rings offered by Drutis Jewellery, the Solomon's Ring (shown here in 9K white gold) features freely moving, lab-grown ruby cabochons alongside an equally movable platinum pebble. It is engraved with the words 'Full of Love'.

Our ten-year plan is at least fifty more kaleidoscope designs, a handful more of Solomon's Ring designs and ten more kinetic jewellery pieces with countless iterations of each. We would love to be present in the United States, Europe, the Asia-Pacific and Middle East-North Africa regions, and we aspire to open a Drutis Jewellery store. We hope to be able to provide a platform within our store for other brands to be discovered, opening a multi-brand section for up-and-coming emerging designers and trailblazing the path for future talent. The Drutis Jewellery store will have only two criteria – be authentic and be unique!

We are sure, amongst all of our goals, there will be peaks and troughs, successes and failures, spot-on designs and those that do not make it. We hope to forever continue making our pieces in our workshop in Ukraine, which will no doubt grow in the years ahead, and our jewellers will create, inspire and produce in a country full of peace.

"Honesty is key, and honesty runs through the veins of a family-run enterprise."

H.J. JOHNSON JEWELLERS

Rachel Nield PJ Dip FGA, Director

The Blanshard family first entered the gem trade in 1926, when John Blanshard opened and established wholesale diamond company Tidy & Blanshard in Hatton Garden. In 1972, his son Philip Blanshard FGA DGA purchased a jewellery shop in Devizes, which had been established in 1866 by Mr. Henry Joseph Johnson. Now in its fourth generation of trade-related work, the family continues to operate H.J. Johnson Jewellers Ltd. Their mission as a small, family-run operation is to give customers confidence through friendly and warm service that comes with many years of experience and knowledge, and to evolve and move with the developing jewellery industry.

How do you think your status as a family-run/multigenerational business factors into your success?

I think our position as a family-owned business factors in our success in many ways. The wealth of knowledge that has been passed down the generations from a young age and the importance of the structure of running a business, quality of service and products, professionalism and customer service – these values will continue to be passed down. There is a vested interest in the business for every generation in our family, and that will always make the respect, customer satisfaction and products we offer of utmost importance in building a family legacy for a successful future business.

The pride that comes with working in a multigenerational business encourages me to want to work harder and achieve more, both for the



The three generations of H.J. Johnson Jewellers — Ruth Blanshard, Philip Blanshard and Rachel Nield PJ Dip FGA — with their Gem-A Diplomas.

success of the company in the future and for my children to, hopefully, one day come on board.

Are there specific challenges to working as a family that are specific to this niche field? If you have a family business that started before your own generation, what challenges might exist for someone who would want to start a jewellery business that did not exist when your family's business started?

I would say that challenges include the ever-changing information, such as technology, and the many variables in this trade. Everything my grandfather learnt about gemmology and jewellery all adds to the quality of our knowledge. However, with so many new gemstones and new lab-grown materials, we are constantly training and must be open to learning every day.

Challenges for someone starting a jewellery business that did not exist when ours started could include building a longstanding loyal customer base, purely because this can take a very long time. Having this foundation helps to keep a good flow of custom through the door, even in tough times. Also, building such an in-depth knowledge of this industry takes many, many years, as there really is so much to learn about, both from a practical and theoretical standpoint.

What is your ten-year plan for yourself and your family from a business perspective?

Our ten-year plan for our business as a family is to continue with our success and our ever-growing customer patronage.

What advice would you give to the next generation of

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your family (the one that is not involved in the business yet, but might become active when they are of age)?

The advice I would give to my children about our business – among many things – would be to keep the values previously mentioned as top priority. If they have a passion for this business and the industry, they will go far.

LOTUS GEMOLOGY

E. Billie Hughes FGA

Co-Founder and Gemmologist

A Bangkok-based laboratory founded by the Hughes family in 2014, Lotus Gemology exclusively tests coloured gemstones, with a focus on identification, treatment and origin determination. All three founding members are passionate about the beauty and rarity of natural coloured gemstones, and we try to share this love with the world by providing high-quality testing reports. By educating the public, they help others appreciate these natural treasures.

How long has your family been in the gem and jewellery trade? How long have you, personally, been involved?

My parents (Richard Hughes and Wimon Manorotkul) and I are all founding members of Lotus Gemology, which we opened together in 2014. That means we all participate in both



The H.J. Johnson Jewellers shopfront many decades ago (left) and as it appears today (right).



LOTUS
GEM-ology



The cover of a Lotus Gemology lab report.

the business side of the operations, as well as the gemmological side. They previously had many decades of experience in the industry but were working with other companies.

While most people that I know in family businesses joined several years after the founding of the company, my path was a little different in that I was present to start the company alongside my parents. This has been a great opportunity, as it has given me a chance to have input from the start, as well as to benefit from their many years of experience.

My parents are both gemmologists, and have each been involved in this trade for over thirty years. Because of their background, I grew up around the trade and visited my first gem mine in Thailand when I was just a toddler. While I was still in university at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), I had the opportunity to join my dad and our friend Vincent Pardieu on a field trip to Madagascar during my summer holidays. This is when I started gaining a better understanding of the importance of field gemmology. I got my FGA in 2013, which is when I started looking at stones in the laboratory, which is how I became interested in gem testing and photomicrography.

Who are your customers? Why do you think they seek you out?

Our clients come from all over the world, and encompass everyone from wholesale gem dealers, private collectors and auction houses and internationally recognised jewellery brands that are household names. From the feedback we've received, our clients seek us out because our philosophy of sharing our love for gems resonates with them and their audiences. They also tend to be familiar with our publications, research, and experience, and so they trust us to test their stones.

How do you think your status as a family-run/multigenerational business factors into your success?

There are definitely some advantages to this type of business. Because

"I was present to start the company alongside my parents. This has been a great opportunity, as it's given me a chance to have input from the start."



The Hughes family of Lotus Gemology – E. Billie Hughes FGA, Richard W. Hughes FGA and Wimon Manorotkul FGA – in Mozambique. Photo courtesy of Lotus Gemology.

my parents have been working for several decades, we benefit from their considerable experience and the relationships they have built over the years. At Lotus, we're certainly more well known especially because of things like my dad's *Ruby & Sapphire* books.

On the other hand, it's also an advantage to have someone from the younger generation like myself involved, to bring new ideas to the table. One of my biggest projects has been our Hyperion inclusion database of over 1,600 photomicrographs, which is available on our website. This has been a very popular tool with our audience.

Are there specific challenges to working as a family that are specific to this niche field? Please explain what they are.

I think it's always challenging to work in a family business. Because of our close ties, we may tend to be less filtered with one another, which naturally creates conflict. But this can also be a source of strength. What is important is that we all believe in the same overall goal, which is to deliver the highest quality of work for our company and for our clients. ■

References available upon request to the Editor.

This photomicrograph of an apatite in sapphire (field of view 6.0 mm) was taken during the examination of the host gemstone at Lotus Gemology's Bangkok lab. Photo by E. Billie Hughes.

