

## ★ TRENDSPOTTING

# Turquoise!

COMPILED BY KATIE NAVARRA

mining and can be found in hues of blue, blue-green and yellow-green.

Many Western retailers recognize that turquoise is not a fad: it's a staple that's here to stay. We asked two retailers who specialize in turquoise jewelry for their perspective and advice on how to authenticate, source, price and sell this product line.

### DIRTY GRINGA CLOTHING



COURTESY OF DIRTY GRINGA CLOTHING

While living in New Mexico, Lauren Brock was surrounded by turquoise. Countless shops carried impressive collections of antique and contemporary jewelry. Intrigued by vintage turquoise, she began saving to open a business of her own. With a little help from her

fiancé, who sold a few cows to fund the start-up, she officially launched The Dirty Gringa in Branford, Florida, in January of 2017.

Brock credits turquoise with putting her business on the map. Prior to offering jewelry, she describes her business as an Instagram boutique that only sold clothing. Countless retailers have success in this market, but she was looking for something to distinguish herself from competitors. Turquoise jewelry did just that.

**Authenticating old pieces:** "When I pick up a piece while out 'junking' I look for a 'sterling' or '.925' stamp. This signifies the piece is sterling silver. Attending classes to learn about the characteristics that set each piece apart from one another has also been helpful. I've been in class with some of the best experts in the industry."

**Determining quality:** "Rarity is a significant factor in quality for high-end collectors. Stone color and matrix composition also determine quality. Here's a little tip some people may not agree with: I feel that turquoise is like wine; pick out what you like. Dealers may tell you what to like, but I say, if it tastes good, drink it. If it looks good, buy it."

**Finding trusted sources:** "I personally know and have relationships with almost everyone I buy from."

**Establishing price points:** "Estimating price points is easier than expected. Google, Google, Google. Research what prices other retailers are selling similar pieces for. Turquoise can be pricey. I always offer layaway to soften the blow."

**Biggest trend in 2017:** "I think 'custom' turquoise jewelry will be the next trend. There are many wonderful silversmiths making mind-blowing custom work. Even though this may be the next biggest trend, you can never replace 'dead pawn' or 'old pawn' items, in my opinion. They just don't make work like that anymore."

### CIMARRON RIVER COMPANY



COURTESY OF CIMARRON RIVER COMPANY

Connie Miller of Cimarron River Company in Satanta, Kansas, first learned about turquoise through her husband, Jim. A lifelong turquoise lover, Jim shared his passion for the gem on their wedding day by giving Connie an inlaid turquoise stone in a gold wedding band. She spent the next few decades buying pieces for her private collection.

In 2002, Connie entered the retail industry when her daughter-in-law established a small business selling palm-leaf cowboy hats. Connie assisted at events and added a small line of jewelry. In 2005, Connie and Jim bought the business and created Cimarron River Company.

The couple hand-selects Native American décor and jewelry for the store to help customers re-create the Southwestern style in their own lives.

**Authenticating old pieces:** "The first thing we do when a customer brings in an older piece of turquoise jewelry is research any marks, style, silver-work and design. An antique piece is anything 100 years or older, and most pieces produced in that time frame are not marked. The best thing to do with a vintage piece is to ask an expert, such as The Heard Museum in Scottsdale, Arizona, or an individual who is highly qualified, like John Hartman with Durango Silver Company."

**Determining quality:** "Look for jewelry with excellent workmanship in silversmithing. Examine the stones and look for those that are well-cut and well-placed in the design."

**Finding trusted sources:** "Buy from a reputable dealer you trust. Several artisans bring their jewelry into our store and we host trunk shows to hand-select items. I also purchase from wholesalers I know and feel confident in their inventory. One resource for finding vendors is the Indian Arts & Crafts Association. The group produces a list of members who have been vetted."

**Establishing price points:** "There are turquoise pieces available for any price point. Jewelry made from block [synthetic] turquoise is affordable and gives the beautiful look turquoise is famous for. Prices increase as the quality of the stone increases. The value also rises in proportion to the amount of sterling silver used."

**Biggest trend in 2017:** "I think people are realizing turquoise jewelry is a valuable asset. When a customer purchases a handmade piece of artwork it is something to cherish and something that can be passed down through the generations. Turquoise is wearable with any outfit, casual to dressy, and I think that vintage-style collectible pieces will be worn more often." ●