

Jason: We're back on Meet the Jewelers and today we interview Kristen Baird in Savannah, Georgia. Kristen, what's your story?

Kristen: I went to an art school called the Savannah College of Art and Design. I was going for interior design and architecture and started in that, but I missed the hands-on aspect of creating a product or something tangible. And so, I tried a jewelry class at school and fell in love immediately. I knew it was what I wanted to do—I knew it would work with my entrepreneurship goals and dreams. I changed my major and went into jewelry in 2010. I've been doing jewelry since then, doing this full-time with a team.

Jason: Was there a moment that you doubted yourself or didn't think this was the right industry?

Kristen: I would be lying if I said there haven't been hard times, for sure, but I've always been pretty comfortable with my decisions to go into jewelry. There's definitely been some rough patches, as with any entrepreneurship venture. But I've loved every minute of it. I've never regretted joining this industry and making it my career. Nine years in, we're doing pretty good.

Jason: What sets you apart?

Kristen: I try to be relatable and approachable. As the designer, I am the face of the brand, and people work with me. It gives more of a personal experience. I work with a lot of clients on redesigns and custom pieces, and it gives them the chance to be involved in the process. It creates a story or adds to a story.

Jason: Can you talk us through one of your favorite engagement experiences?

Kristen: Sometimes I work with the couple and both are involved and sometimes it's a complete surprise. And sometimes it's for somebody who I actually know, which is even more pressure on me. With all of the projects, they each have their unique twist. I recap a lot of that on my website, which is kind of fun, so people can hear the behind the scenes of what happened to get to these pieces, whether it's an engagement ring or a redesign surprise. I just did a fiftieth anniversary, which was an awesome piece to work on.

Jason: Can you walk us through some fun highlights over the course of the next year and beyond that you see for your brand?

Kristen: We're taking on more commission and we're doing more heirloom redesigns than we've ever done. With each one that we do, it opens more doors and more stories to share with followers and clients, to show the potential of what we can do here in Savannah. Also, I recently welcomed my first baby to the world, he's three weeks old today.

Jason: Congratulations!

Kristen: Thank you! I have a baby business and I have a baby baby. It's an interesting dynamic, but motherhood has given me this whole new outlook and perspective on life. I'm inspired to create a new mother-themed line, something a little different than the traditional birthstone collections, that's going to incorporate family and children. I'm super excited about that because it's a different stage of life for me.

Jason: Are there any causes or charity work that you guys do?

Kristen: We have our charity partner, SD Gunner Fund, and they train and provide service animals for veterans and disabled children. We are a military town here in Savannah. We have a lot of military in our family. I think, to date, they've done over forty-five dogs, which they've trained and provided locally. These animals are super expensive and a lot of families can't afford them. We're really honored to be a part of helping these people get these dogs--they're life-changing for them.

Jason: What are some of your favorite products?

Kristen: My favorite thing to do is make rings. They're so fun to design and hand-fabricate. I have my Bonjour Belle collection, which was inspired by my time spent last summer at an artist residency in France. That was a pretty amazing experience—I got to go to France for two months to create a completely new collection fully sponsored by my alma mater, SCAD. My Ripple Collection all started with my love of the outdoors and nature. There's a lot of coastal references since we're on the water here. Each piece and collection has a story and a sub-plot. Some of my favorites are my rings from my fine collection. A lot of those draw back to memories with my grandmother. The inspiration and the backstory that go into each piece is part of my heart.

Jason: Is there a proposal story that blew your socks off?

Kristen: One of the best ones was when I designed a ring for one of my best friends. It was a surprise to her. I worked with him for a good bit of time to create this piece—and I couldn't say a word. I got to be a part of it, even though it was from a distance, because it was my ring that ended up on her finger. And of course, she knew exactly who it was from when she saw it. That might be one of my favorites.

Jason: How about a reimagination experience? Have you been able to melt the gold and use the diamonds?

Kristen: I finished one recently for a client, she came to me and said, “You know, I have this box of jewelry. I’m the only female in a family that inherits this, it all funnels down from my grandmother, from my great aunt, from my mom.” I think it was thirteen pieces of jewelry that we broke down and pulled all the diamonds and turned it into this beautiful pendant. It had a two carat at the center. She opened it and immediate waterworks, it was just so exciting because this was all of her family jewelry into a piece that she could cherish and pass

down--but something that she would actually wear. I always judge everything on the tear factor.

Jason: What do you think the reason is they choose you in Savannah?

Kristen: I think the thing that initially starts it is they see the reviews. They see the pieces that I've worked on. They see something a little different. A lot of times, people see the press coverage that I've gotten, which is awesome. I think the personal connection really seals it for a lot of people.

Jason: What is something that you want our audience to know?

Kristen: I am a female-owned business, and I am young, and I'm not yet a generation-based business. Here in Savannah, we're really excited to be offering a brand that's close to home, uses ethically-sourced materials, and believes in independent designers. We're really grateful for the people who have believed in us and who have given me the opportunity to make my dreams a reality.