



Sampat Jewellers creations featuring diamonds (from left): Chandelier earrings; Modern mangalsutra; Rose Petal ring; Crescent mangalsutra; Millennial Globe pendant; Millennial ring.

MANGALSUTRAS FOR MILLENNIALS

Tailoring the traditional Indian wedding necklace to today's brides is the specialty of online retailer Sampat Jewellers. By **Joyce Kauf**

"For an Indian woman, the mangalsutra is the piece of jewelry that she treasures for a lifetime," says Jinal Sampat. The Sampat Jewellers designer is describing the traditional necklace the groom ties around the bride's neck during the wedding ceremony.

"But these necklaces are often too big and too elaborate and worn only on special occasions. Millennials want jewelry that matches their lifestyle," she adds. To meet those needs, she creates more modern mangalsutras — wearable, versatile jewelry that can go from day to night.

Sampat, who started her business four years ago with husband Kunal, was introduced to diamond jewelry through her father-in-law, Sudhir Sampat, but never studied jewelry design. After majoring in architecture in Mumbai, she earned a master's degree in landscape architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), "surrounded by jewelry designers." Yet she credits Facebook with directing her creative bent to fashioning custom mangalsutras and selling them online.

"After doing research, I put out some mangalsutra designs to understand the desires and wants



A FAMILY STORY

Sometimes it's all about making the right match.

"Sudhir Sampat, my [then]-future father-in-law, opened a diamond-cutting and -polishing business in Mumbai in 1977, and later began selling jewelry. My parents were clients. Both families conspired to introduce us," says Jinal Sampat, recalling how she met Kunal, her husband, who oversees SEO and business strategy for their company's site.

Intrigued by the creative potential of designing jewelry and the desire to preserve the family heritage, the couple, now living in San Jose, California, began Sampat Jewellers in 2013. The fact that Sudhir had no pictures of any of his designs convinced Jinal to sell online, where she has since seen a strong response. sapatjewellers.com

of today's Indian brides. I received over 100 responses within a few hours," she recalls.

Feminine and floral

Sampat brings an architect's eye for structure to her designs, along with a love for the beauty of nature, which comes through in their names — Lotus, Jasmine, Flower of Life. "Combining the simplicity of landscaping with feminine and floral components creates a richer design, while the diamonds create an arch around the neck," she points out.

In designing a custom piece, she takes her creative cues from the client's personality. "I do my homework," she says. "I study her lifestyle, her tastes, where she hangs out, what she likes to do."

She also encourages the client to visit the company website to see how traditional elements can be updated and personalized. Options include choosing pear- or cushion-cut diamonds, using changeable gemstones, adding tassels, incorporating ethnic elements such as kundan or polki diamonds — the rough diamonds used in Rajasthani jewelry — or setting the mangalsutra in rose gold or two-tone gold. One of her favorite

designs substitutes a thin, three-strand chain of diamonds for the traditional black beads, resulting in a shimmering halo that frames the face.

Sampat's next step is to sketch some ideas and then create a collage in Photoshop that shows diamonds in different settings. After discussing it with the client, she sends the collage to the company's artisans in Mumbai, who originally come from West Bengal. Depending on the complexity of the piece, several different artisans may be involved. She communicates with them via WhatsApp to refine the details. A mold is then created and sent to Sampat, who photographs it and uses it as the basis for further discussions and refinements with the client.

"It is a very personal experience that our clients appreciate," she says. "The piece is handcrafted, but being part of the design process makes it truly unique for them."

The mangalsutras range in price from \$2,000 to \$6,000, and the average start-to-finish time is approximately six weeks. All diamonds meet Gemological Institute of America (GIA) grading standards of G color or higher, VS clarity or higher, and Excellent cut.

Sampat does not use melee in any of her designs, but notes that colored gemstones, such as rubies, emeralds and blue or yellow sapphires, are gaining in popularity.

Attractive and affordable

While Sampat enjoys the creative challenges of creating custom mangalsutras, the company promotes itself as "The Modern Indian Jeweler" and offers bracelets, bangles, pendants and rings as well. Sampat recently introduced the Millennial collection, which consists of a diamond mangalsutra, a ring and studs, and plans to develop more affordable collections geared toward this target market. While most of her clients are Indian, she has seen a growing cross-cultural customer base, with brides from all over the US and even Australia.

"When we started this company, Kunal and I knew that the jewelry market in the US was saturated," she says. "You have to understand your market and find your special niche. And then keep refining it. Testing on Facebook lets us do that, but it's an ongoing process."

Keeping with family tradition, Sampat adheres to the core values her father-in-law instilled in her. "You have to think about the customer first, even if you have to take a loss. You have to ensure a consistent, high level of quality — in the gemstones and workmanship. Finally, it's imperative to take care of your employees. The artisans leave their families to work for us. It's in our generation's hands to give them educational opportunities so they can grow professionally. It's good for the industry, too." ■

FOUR TIPS TO ONLINE SUCCESS

Jinal Sampat shares her four-pronged online strategy for reaching her target audience and driving business to her site:

- **Facebook** is the most beneficial. We actively engage with Facebook groups, sharing product images and blog posts. It is an effective testing platform — the response is immediate.

- **Instagram** lets us experiment with attention-getting creative concepts. We partnered with photographers and models to share unique visuals such as the story of Holi, the Indian festival of color.

- **Pinterest** is the most significant for generating traffic to our site. Participating in Pinterest group boards enables us to pin on other boards, which increases our website traffic.

- **SEO** is a continuing evolving strategy. We have started to add more rich content in the form of long-form articles.