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TO CHROMATIC,  
26 UP-TO-  
THE-MINUTE  
DESIGNS

## Future Perfect

10 Things Every Retailer  
Needs to Know for a  
Productive, Prosperous  
New Year

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# 5 PEOPLE TO WATCH

Tastemakers, trend-setters, and top brass—they're all changing the retail game

## 1. Michael Barnes, CEO designate, Signet Jewelers

Not many people in the jewelry industry know Michael ("Mike") Barnes, but next year they will. On Jan. 30, 2011, the 50-year-old Barnes officially takes the reins from the retiring Terry Burman and becomes the new chief executive officer of America's largest jewelry chain, Signet Jewelers, owner of Kay Jewelers and Jared the Galleria of Jewelry (two of the most successful brands in the United States), as well as two of the biggest jewelers in the U.K. Until he got the Signet nod following the company's two-year search, Barnes was president, chief operating officer, and director of watch and fashion brand Fossil, which includes a retail division with 127 retail doors and 74 outlet stores in the United States. The industry is actively watching to see whether Barnes—who spent 25 years (virtually his entire career) at Fossil—can maintain the Burman mojo. —RB



Michael Barnes



Beryl Raff



New De Beers CEO?

## 2. Beryl Raff, CEO, Helzberg Diamonds

Is Helzberg Diamonds morphing into the East Coast version of Ben Bridge Jeweler? The chain store business generally doesn't provide a lot of surprises, but Kansas City, Mo.-based CEO Beryl Raff certainly turned heads when her 237-store chain applied for membership in the American Gem Society, joining Ben Bridge, its Berkshire Hathaway sibling in the guild. Suppliers say Helzberg is inching slightly upscale; consider the company's exclusive new bridal line by Judith Ripka (see Jewel Box, page 17). Where is Helzberg headed? Raff, who told *JCK* in July that the retailer has always catered to the "upscale middle market," is keeping tight-lipped for now. —RB

## 3. Question mark: new CEO, De Beers

At press time, the De Beers Group hadn't announced a replacement for outgoing CEO Gareth Penny, who resigned in July, although the role is currently being filled by a pair of interim "co-CEOs" (CFO Stuart Brown and chief commercial officer Bruce Cleaver). But whoever assumes what is arguably the diamond industry's most important position will face a pile of challenges and questions: Will the miner sell more of its diamonds by tender? (See No. 5 of our "10 Things Retailers Need to Know.") Will its trio of owners—Anglo-American, Debswana, and the Oppenheimer family—still support it? And how about its marketing initiatives, including the Forevermark and its retail chain? There has even been talk of the company's going public again. Penny tried to drag the former cartel—and the trade—kicking and screaming into the 21st century. He wasn't always successful. His successor probably won't find charting the 140-year-old company's place in the new world any easier. —RB



Chris Del Gatto



Natalie Massenet

## 4. Chris Del Gatto, CEO, CIRCA Jewels

Since its inception in 2001, CIRCA Jewels—a New York City-based company that purchases estate jewelry and secondhand diamonds—has quickly become a business to watch. That's because CEO and chair Chris Del Gatto woos both consumers and retailers, and has been steadily building the ranks of the company's retail partners by buying their unwanted jewelry. Some 400 stores nationwide—many of which call CIRCA's customer service "upscale" and the purchase prices "fair"—provide inventory for the brand, which resells items to collectors, discounters, and others. Retailers like Underwood Jewelers in Jacksonville, Fla., say CIRCA aids stores lacking estate departments by helping clients dispose of unwanted items. Del Gatto also maintains a select stable of 20 U.S.-based authorized purchasing agent retailers who are permitted to take in jewelry on CIRCA's behalf; the brand aims to boost those numbers to 75 in the next few years. The company will also supplement its offices in New York City, Chicago, Palm Beach, San Francisco, Hong Kong, Washington, D.C., and Barcelona, Spain, with new locations in Dallas, Paris, and the Middle East, among other locales. In 2010, CIRCA Jewels participated in 11 in-store buying events; in 2011, it aims to up that to 25. (For more on CIRCA events, see Gold, page 94.) And while the company made its name buying jewelry, Del Gatto has even bigger plans for the secondhand diamond market. "By 2015, we estimate that we'll be buying a quarter of a billion dollars in diamonds from the general public," he says. "That's diamonds that don't need to be mined, and we're just scratching the surface." —JH

## 5. Natalie Massenet, founder/chair, Net-a-Porter

Even fashionistas who haven't yet succumbed to the quick-as-a-click allure of online shopping know that if you're looking for straight-from-the-runways designer merch, there's only one URL you need. Net-a-Porter sounded like a crazy idea 10 years ago when Natalie Massenet dreamed it up—and lots of people told her as much. (Women won't buy Louboutins online!) Last April, when the Anglo-American ex-fashion journalist sold her stake for some \$76 million—to luxury group Richemont, no less—everyone was wondering why they didn't think of it first. (Women *will* buy Louboutins online. Especially when they're accompanied by a try-it-on-at-home, free-return-shipment promise.) Massenet's stable of everyone-who's-anyone designers runs the gamut from Alaïa to Zac Posen and includes fine-jewelry brands like Marie-Hélène de Taillac, Solange Azagury-Partridge, and Pippa Small. In 2009, Net-a-Porter spawned the designer discount site The Outnet; next will be men's site Mr. Porter. Message to retailers: Speed, service, and selection reign supreme for savvy shoppers. Especially when the items come beautifully gift-wrapped at no extra fee. —Melissa Rose Bernardo

MASSNET: MIKE MARSLAND/GETTY IMAGES

# GOLD

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## Birds of Paradise

A one-of-a-kind locket in 18k yellow and white gold and 20k rose gold weighs 300 grams and measures 2.5 inches long by 0.375 inch deep. With 479 pavé-set round diamonds (on the front and back) totaling 3.68 cts., the pendant was inspired by a piece of Japanese history—a carved-wood Edo-period box featuring cranes. The birds, which have long been a symbol of the soul, symbolize good luck, long life, marriage, and—when shown in flight—freedom from limitations. (\$125,000; Kim Kaufman Designs, New York City; 914-462-0605; [kimkaufmandesigns.com](http://kimkaufmandesigns.com))

## Secondhand Success Stories

**Ricky Bromberg is happy** to take diamond trade-ins at his 174-year-old store, but has less enthusiasm for estate transactions. “Buying old jewelry is just not something that we do on a day-to-day basis,” explains the president of Bromberg & Co. in Birmingham, Ala.

So he was intrigued when his brother Clayton—president of Northeast Florida’s Underwood Jewelers—hosted CIRCA public buying events in his Ponte Vedra Beach and Jacksonville locations. Clayton also lacks an estate department, but when the recession hit, he began seeing more and more customers with merchandise to sell. “CIRCA was better than any outfit we’d ever worked with as far as consistency and how they spoke to our customers,” Clayton says of the 9-year-old global jewelry-buying company. His events, held last March, went well, to say the least: “We had more appointments the first 30 minutes than the team could handle the rest of the day.”

Buoyed by his sibling’s success, Ricky Bromberg decided to hold two separate two-day events in his Summit and Mountain Brook stores. While CIRCA reps did appraisals, store staff acted as hosts, ensuring guests were comfortable with seats and beverages. “We thought a CIRCA event might help our customers liquidate things they no longer want, in an environment they’re comfortable with, and possibly use those dollars to buy something new,” says Ricky. To alert Bromberg & Co. shoppers, CIRCA paid for a direct mailing and helped fund four full-page black-and-white newspaper ads.

Some 60 daily slots were scheduled (and filled) on event days; walk-ins were also accommodated. “There were easily 100 people through the stores on both days,” says Ricky.

CIRCA reps cut checks for consumers who accepted their appraisals, and Bromberg & Co. received a 5 percent to 10 percent commission. Meanwhile, anyone who bought new jewelry that day was permitted to sign over CIRCA



CIRCA rep Craig Miller with a client at Bromberg & Co.’s Mountain Brook store

checks to Bromberg & Co., which then gave them 20 percent more spending money. Plus: Thanks to the store’s new CIRCA agent status—and vice versa, as CIRCA is its authorized purchasing agent—it can still take in pieces and obtain quotes after events.

“The events were more of an art and less of a science,” Ricky says. “One customer might have a lot of pieces, others had only one—it was difficult to run like clockwork.” But would he do it again? Yes—just not too soon: “We wouldn’t want to overfish the waters.” —Jennifer Heebner

**“Most of our gold income is from gold buys. The retail product that’s moving is basic—plain, patterned, or electroformed hoops from Quality Gold, Leslie’s, and Lee’s Gold Imports for price points ranging from \$175 to \$400. Gold bangles have also been selling well. We’re hoping Christmas will be better than last year; that was the low point of our entire 30 years. This year has been steady and looks promising.”**

**—Randall Heim, owner,  
Golden Renaissance Jewelers,  
Waldorf, Md.**



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