



TALKING TIDBITS WITH JEWELRY DESIGNER TAWNYA WARREN OF ZOE

“My path to design was inherent as a child. Early on, I would collect antique jewelry and exclaim, ‘If only the jewelry could speak, the stories it would tell!’” says Tawnya Warren, the jewelry designer behind the XO Exclusively Ours collection [Zoe](#), when asked about her early days.

Born and raised in Pennsylvania, Tawnya had to convince her parents to send her to school in Manhattan. Succeeding, she started her foray into design at FIT, where she discovered a passion for millinery. “I loved the hand-sewn detail work that went into each piece,” she says.

Tawnya actually began with accessories – making patterns, hand-sewn shoes, hats, handbags and belts – because the cost of leather hides were cheaper than diamonds. But she eventually made the leap to her true passion: jewelry design. When it finally came time to design her first piece, Tawnya remembers everything, even the first diamond she bought. “I stared at it for an hour before taking the plunge. I cried when my first ring sold,” she says. “I made one piece to fund the second. Sold two pieces, then made four. And that was how the business began.”

We’ve told you about Tawnya’s start. Read on to find out what followed...

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**Where do you find inspiration for your designs?**

Inspirations are organic. Ideas flow from strong lines of African furniture, silhouettes of antique head blocks used for millinery, the contrast in black and white images, patterns in rocks and shells on the seashore and the rose glow from the sunsets.

**What are some of your favorite Zoe pieces?**

The [dark cognac cushion diamond ring](#) with a matching [cognac pear shape eternity band](#), stacked with the [platinum rose cut diamond eternity band](#) and a skinny [baguette eternity band](#) in oxidized platinum. I love to see the bands mixed.

**You’re a Barneys alumna – what was your role; what did you learn there?**

I began on the selling floor in the fine jewelry department before deciding to learn the behind-the-

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scenes and ask to be moved to the buying office. When I moved to Santa Monica after nearly 10 years in New York, Barneys offered me a selling position in the fine jewelry department in the Beverly Hills store. I learned every aspect of the industry: the importance of the client, timelines, follow-through and always surrounding yourself with good people. This fall marks my seventh year as an exclusive Barneys vendor.

**Do you have any funny anecdotes from your time working there?**

It was one of my first mornings accompanying the buying office during a floor move of the jewelry department at the Madison Avenue store. I was carrying a tray of beautiful hand-blown glass rings from Italy. I dropped them all on the concrete floor and they shattered! Now, I can laugh about it.

**What do you look for in a material?**

Always the unusual. Diamonds in opaque hues where no two are ever the same. My favorite travel destination for materials is Bora Bora for variations of hand-carved Tahitian pearls. The carver makes them look like intricate tribal tattoos. I love to watch him work and even tried carving a few myself. My love for scuba diving makes pearls one of my favorite gifts from the sea.

**Tell us about your design process.**

The stone should speak for the piece and be the focal point. The metal will hold the wearer's own energy. I find my greatest strength by the shore, waves crashing, dolphins jumping, and an occasional seal during my daily walks. Often you will find piles of diamonds scattered on my work table while I'm deciding which should stand alone and which should be paired with multiple smaller stones to complete the design. My 5-year-old son will also play with "mommy's treasures" and critique a piece before it is put into production.

**Who is the woman you design for?**

Strong, confident, independent women who love life and live for their passion, and don't have anything to prove. I want them to feel as if anything in life is possible no matter their situation. Even on your worst days remember the sun always shines at the end of the tunnel and sometimes there is even a rainbow.

**Why do you think accessorizing is so important?**

It tells your story, your mood. How we adorn ourselves speaks volumes about our self-image. It is a reflection of your soul. The jewelry takes on your energy.

**What's the best piece of advice you've received along the way?**

Someone told me once that I have an intrepid spirit. I am never afraid, no matter how life unfolds. With mistakes come our greatest lessons. Fear only inhibits us. Everyday strive to do your best.

**Tell us about the name Zoe.**

It is my alter ego—that curly haired wild child behind my conservative self. I have always been about opposites—the old fashioned yet cutting edge. I came from a humble beginning so design was never about fame or fortune. I wanted the jewelry to speak for itself to commemorate a special event. To be cherished for a lifetime and handed down for generations. To take on an energy of their own and speak to grandchildren for generations to come of the love that built their family.



1. Champagne, yellow & white diamond earrings; 2. Pink sapphire & diamond chandelier earrings; 3. Yellow & white diamond twist ring; 4. Champagne diamond eternity band; 5. Charm necklace; 6. Opaque champagne diamond multi-shape earrings; 7. Diamond hoop earrings

**[Shop the entire Zoe collection on Barneys.com.](#)**

Image of Tawnya courtesy of Martin Herbst (Makeup by Sandy Posner of Barneys Beverly Hills)

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That is so cool. Love her stuff!

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Tawnya, your designs truly remind me of you! Congrats on your success!

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such beautiful pieces Tawnya... proud of you.

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Gorgeous picture and amazing article Tawnya! Your designs are so beautiful!

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Zoe's designs are absolutely gorgeous! I love every piece!

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