



## scaling the heights

Architect and jewellery designer Genevieve Lilley's own scope of works scans both the bigger picture and the smallest details.

NECESSITY MAY WELL be the mother of invention, in more than one sense. For Sydney-based architect Genevieve Lilley, her need to keep expressing her creativity, albeit through a different design discipline, was itself borne of motherhood.

Lilley is the award-winning designer for Venerari, the design-driven jewellery business her husband Kingsley Wallman founded in October 2004. Venerari (Latin for 'to venerate, revere and adore'), based in Sydney's historic Strand Arcade, has made a name for itself through its designs featuring coloured gemstones and (boldly rehabilitated) opals in often ingeniously engineered precious metal settings.

When Lilley and Wallman returned here after nearly a decade away living in the United Kingdom and the United States, they were keen to "shake things up a bit".

Lilley worked for London architect David Chipperfield for seven years (and later, for herself) designing everything from furniture and lighting, retail fit-outs and residential, and Wallman worked as a corporate lawyer.

The seed which later blossomed into Venerari was first sowed when they were travelling in Spain on an extended holiday.

"It's rare to be given the time to evaluate how you live and work," says Lilley. >



Genevieve Lilley, **LEFT**, in her studio on the top level of Sydney's historic Strand Arcade, overlooking the Pitt Street Mall. On the Arcade's ground floor is the Lilley-designed interior of Venerari, **ABOVE**, the jewellery shop founded by her husband, lawyer-turned-gemologist Kingsley Wallman. **BELOW**: like an out-sized jewellery box, the store's discreet exterior, offers fleeting glimpses of the treasures contained within.



In the studio, **ABOVE**, architectural models of Lilley's projects sit beside a window overlooking the Mall. **INSET RIGHT**: the 'GD-B-31' ring, features green tourmalines and three Australian sapphires.





A feat of engineering in itself, this steel staircase, **FAR LEFT**, was craned into position. **LEFT**: 'GD-E-B' pendant, in sterling silver set with nine, square solid boulder opals. To one side of the studio, **BELOW**, a team of jewellery makers craft Lilley's – as well as their own – designs. The architectural practice is conducted from desks on the opposite wall (not pictured).

*"With jewellery, you can carry the idea around wholly in your head, whereas with architecture you are always having to test it"*

< "Our lives were already packed up in a container. After Kingsley's job finished in the US – where we'd moved from London – we had no commitments in any particular country. We had one small child and another on the way and both of us felt we had this six months that might be the lynchpin to the next part of our lives." Enter Venerari, and re-enter Genevieve Lilley: jewellery designer.

Despite the obvious differences in scale, timeframes, materials and budget, Lilley says designing jewellery embodies many of the same principles and concepts that a piece of architecture or interior design does.

"With jewellery, you can carry the idea around wholly in your head, whereas with architecture you are always having to test it, and work it and change it and break it."

And while the mother of two admits architecture can be tricky part-time, her practice is at least handily situated: on the Strand Arcade's third floor (above Venerari).

With views overlooking the Pitt Street Mall, Lilley divides her time – and the studio's physical space – between her architectural projects (currently a mix of domestic and retail commissions) and overseeing the team making her jewellery collections. "In my design work, I like hopping from scale to scale and material to material," she says. "I try not to have a style but an approach."

Many architects tend not to wear jewellery, according to Lilley. "They'd say, 'oh it has no purpose, it's redundant, it's all about fake adornment'. I used to say that too, until I was completely scuppered by Kingsley giving me a very large, beautiful, Western Queensland sapphire – unset – and then I had to work out what to do with it!" **RICHARD WALLER**  
Venerari, Shop 13, Strand Arcade, 412 George Street, Sydney, NSW, (02) 9222 9797; [www.venerari.com](http://www.venerari.com). Genevieve Lilley Architects, Suite 309, Strand Arcade. (02) 9222 1885, [www.genevivelilley.com](http://www.genevivelilley.com).

**ABOVE:** all but the most complex of Venerari's jewellery designs are custom-made with tools in the upstairs studio. **INSET, ABOVE RIGHT:** 'GD-Y-29' bespoke solid boulder man's ring, in 18ct white gold, white and black rhodium, pavé set with rubies, sapphires and emeralds.