

MEMBER PROFILE

JOHN FORD



IN 1987, JOHN FORD JEWELERS was opened as a brick and mortar jewelry store in Galveston, Texas specializing in wholesale jewelry repairs and manufacturing, as well as serving the local customer base. John's penchant for giving back to the community spurred his numerous leadership roles in Galveston. John has served

as an elected official, in the capacity of president of the Galveston Independent School District Board of Trustees; an appointed official, in the capacity of Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Port of Galveston; Vice Chairman of the Central Appraisal District Board of Directors for Galveston County; and numerous other boards and commissions. John currently serves as president of the Rural Rail Transportation District of Galveston County.

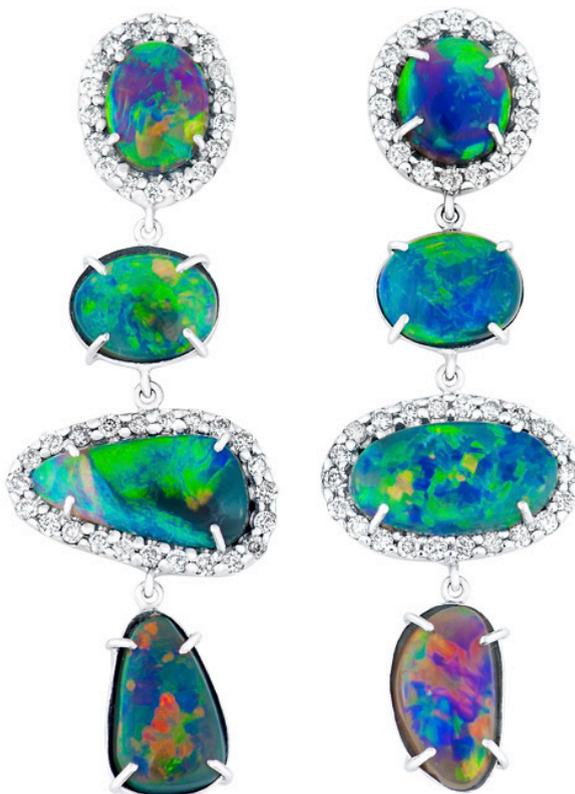
Aside from designing exquisite jewelry, the joys of John's life are his two sons, John Jr., a second-year law student at Southern Methodist University; and Christopher, a junior majoring in business at Texas A&M University. John's undeniably proud that both sons are active in the promotion of the Lightning Ridge Collection.

What is your favorite AGTA Memory?

"I have many fond AGTA memories, the most special being last year's AGTA Spectrum Awards™ Gala, where I received my Spectrum Award. Sharing that experience with my sons, John Jr. and Christopher, as well as close friends from Australia, made for a very happy table!"

What drew you to jewelry, and more specifically, Opals?

"I fell in love with Lightning Ridge Opal 30 years ago; it was love at first sight. The colors, the brilliance, and the beauty- combined with the fact that it's 100% natural - is overwhelming and deeply resonates with me."



How long have you worked with Lightning Ridge Opals?

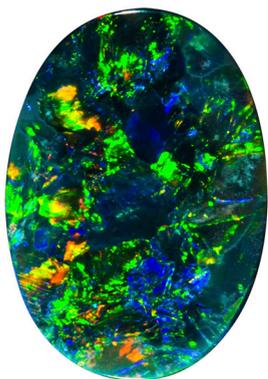
"I started working with Lightning Ridge Opal in 1985, I designed a few pieces a year and wholesaled a small number of gemstones, but mostly I sold Diamonds and did wholesale custom design work. Then in about 2000, by pure chance, I meet and became close friends with an Australian who reawakened my interest in opals. In 2008 Hurricane Ike devastated my life and showroom and I had a lot of time to reflect on what I really wanted to do with the rest of my life. I came up with the idea of starting the Lightning Ridge Collection and designing Lightning Ridge Opal and diamonds my way."

What are the main characteristics that make Lightning Ridge Opals different?

"The main characteristics that make Lightning Ridge Opal so unique and special are its vibrant colors: red, blue, green, yellow, and orange; coupled with infinitely unique properties that ensures that no two gemstones are ever alike. Further, since Lightning Ridge Opal is 100% natural from nature, it only needs a skilled gem cutter to unlock its inner beauty."

What's it like to see someone on the street wearing one of your creations?

"It's the greatest feeling in the world- and it's happened a lot over the years. I must admit seeing my designs worn at this year's Academy Awards® was a very emotional and immensely gratifying experience."



ABOVE CENTER: 18k white gold earrings featuring four freeform Lightning Ridge black Opals (8.72 ctw.).

BELOW LEFT: 6.84 ct. Lightning Ridge black Opal.

BELOW RIGHT: 6.15 ct. Lightning Ridge black Opal.

What advice would you give to someone interested in getting into the jewelry design business?

“Besides getting involved with AGTA, I would advise them to gain a mastery of the production side of jewelry design. In order to be a good jewelry designer you have to understand production processes, costs and have a strong gemological knowledge of the gemstones you are working with.”

What is your favorite piece you've ever created – and what made it so special?

“My favorite piece would be the “Maxine”, which won an AGTA Spectrum Award™ in 2014. I had a great idea for the design, found a special Opal in Lightning Ridge, and I serendipitously named the ring after Maxine O'Brien, the manager of the Lightning Ridge Miner's Association, with the condition that if I won she would come see me receive the Spectrum Award in Tucson. And she did!”



How do you approach a new collection? Where do your ideas evolve from?

“It's just inspiration; in the case of the Lightning Ridge Collection, I loved black Opal and wanted to design jewelry so others could also fall in love with it. My designs normally start with a mental picture followed by a quick sketch and then it's to the bench or to my gem cutter. Some ideas pan out, others don't. Some days I tell my friends I came up with 5 great designs, and then it's weeks without an idea. I think Edison crystallized it best when he said “it's more perspiration than inspiration.”

“I fell in love with Lightning Ridge Opal 30 years ago; it was love at first sight.”



What's next? What's your vision for the future of your brand?

“Thanks to the exposure from winning an AGTA Spectrum Award™ and participating in multiple AGTA events my line will be in showing in about 12 stores nationwide between now and Christmas. My goal is to have relationships, either with my line in store or exhibited at trunk shows, in a limited number of stores about 24 or so nationwide. I will be exhibiting for the first time at AGTA GemFair Tucson™ in 2016 and look forward to exhibiting my finished designs and loose Opals, and hope to add more stores in the future.”

What type of person do you have in mind when designing the line?

“I want to expose the Lightning Ridge Collection to someone who only thinks Opal is white based. To see Lightning Ridge Opal is to love it, I want to share this special gemstone with as many people as possible.”

How would you describe your designs?

“I would describe my designs as predominantly classical, but with a number of modern elements incorporated.”

What are your favorite materials to work with?

“My favorite materials begin, of course, with Lightning Ridge Opals, mixed with Diamonds set in either 18K gold or platinum.”

What are you working on now? Any new designs you can hint at?

“The line is expanding and I am working with earrings, pendants and bracelets that incorporate multiple black Opals that don't necessarily match. I have a new line of men's jewelry on the drawing board, as well. As for hints, if time permits, I am hoping to have an example of each in this year's AGTA Spectrum Awards™ along with a couple of special surprise pieces.”

Name two icons you admire and why.

John Wayne; I always enjoyed watching his movies with my father growing up. The Duke's on-screen persona is a perfect match for someone like me from Texas.

Elvis Presley; I was a big fan growing up, loved the way he wore his jewelry with such zeal. I admired his rags to riches story and the lessons of the pit falls of his success that we can all learn from.

It's happy hour. What are you drinking?

“Devil's Cut or Jim Beam Kentucky Bourbon.”

Do you have a most treasured item in your personal jewelry collection?

Yes, a simple gold cross made by a good friend, Hal George. Hal was a talented goldsmith who died way too young. I have worn it for over 25 years.

By Megan Whitmire, AGTA

LEFT ABOVE: 18K white gold ring featuring a 2.91 ct. Lightning Ridge black Opal accented with Diamonds (1.82 ctw.). LEFT BELOW: 18K white gold ring featuring a 2.43 ct. Lightning Ridge black Opal accented with round brilliant-cut Diamonds (1.82 ctw.).