



The Revere Academy is located in San Francisco's historic Phelan Building.

THE REVERE ACADEMY: Goldsmiths Celebrate Silver Anniversary

BY EILEEN KERRIGAN, SENIOR COPY EDITOR

The school started by Alan Revere is celebrating a quarter-century of service to the jewelry industry.

Champagne on April Fool's Day? It may not be a tradition, but corks were popping on April 1, 2004—the day the Revere Academy of Jewelry Arts celebrated its 25th anniversary. The school that began as a single private class taught by founder and master goldsmith Alan Revere has evolved into an internationally recognized training facility for jewelers, offering dozens of classes and three diploma programs—and that's something worth celebrating.

Once upon a time ... In 1969, Alan Revere was just another college student—psychology major, art minor—fresh out of the University of Virginia, still undecided about what to do next. “Some of my friends were headed to law school,” he recalls, “and I figured that might not be a bad idea. So I took the entrance exam, got pretty high scores, applied to law school, and was headed to Boston College.” ➤



Alan Revere's bench, 2004

Or so he thought.

Later that summer, Revere joined a group of friends on their way to a weekend concert ... and three days later, all bets were off. "After Woodstock, I realized that I didn't want to be a lawyer—I wanted to pursue art," he says. "Everything [but art] was tied into the economy. It was a typical hippie thing—I wanted to run away from money. But if you're really successful, money will find you."

Revere remembered that one of his sculpture professors had mentioned an arts community in Mexico, and he set out to find it. "I bought a VW bus, painted it purple and green, and wound my way around the Gulf Coast to Mexico," he says. "I was taken on by a master craftsman at the Instituto Allende in Guanajuato, Mexico, and within 10 minutes I had found it—a passion for jewelry. I stayed up day and night making jewelry."

Revere soon discovered that his teacher, while wonderfully talented, was really a tinsmith and not well versed in the art of jewelry-making—and the student soon outpaced the teacher. "Within a year I was teaching," he says. "I stayed just a step ahead of my students, learning as I went." In 1972 he earned an MFA in Sculpture.

While he was working at the studio in Mexico, Revere met Harold O'Connor, now a member of the Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG), who had come to Mexico to earn a master's degree. Previously, O'Connor had studied at the Goldschmiedeschule Pforzheim and Fachhochschule für Gestaltung (also in Pforzheim), West Germany. "When he opened his portfolio, it blew my mind," Revere says. "I was amazed that the skills I was learning could be taken to this level. I told my fiancée we were going to Germany."

When Revere received the application for the German school, he discovered it was long, involved—and written in German. "A friend who spoke German helped me fill it out in German, so they assumed I spoke German," he says.

Upon his arrival in Germany, however, school officials were less than pleased to discover that Revere was less than fluent in their native language. "They did-



Alan Revere instructs Catherine Hylands in 1983 at the Revere Academy.

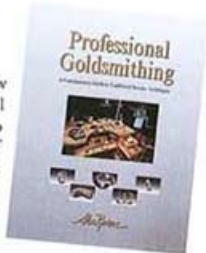


Catherine Hylands instructs a student at the Academy in 2004.

n't want to let me in!" he says. "But then a Dutch fellow behind me said, 'This is my friend and we're taking all our classes together.' " The Dutch fellow promised to translate the material for Revere. "Fortunately, a lot of German words are similar to English—things like 'exact' and 'precise.' I followed him around for six or seven months until I could do it on my own."

In Pforzheim, a center for jewelry-making for 200 years, Revere finally found what he'd been looking for. Here, students from 55 countries were taught Old World skills; the finest jewelers in the world sent their children there to learn from the best in the business.

"The master who took me under his wing, Reinhold Bothner, celebrated his 50th year as a master goldsmith while I was there," Revere recalls. "He was the most respected jeweler in a town of 20,000 jewelers."



Alan Revere has written numerous books on jewelry making, including *Professional Goldsmithing*.



Alan Revere pans for gold in 1979 ...

... and sculpts it in 2004.



As he had done in Mexico, Revere worked for one of his teachers: "I worked nonstop, evenings, nights," he says. "From 1972 to 1974, I pursued advanced studies there."

Passing the torch. When Revere had learned all the German school could teach him, he returned to the Bay Area, where he worked in a trade shop for a year. "I spent my time there sizing 10 to 15 rings an hour, honed my skills and got fast, and learned about repairs."

But Revere was eager to put his new-found knowledge to the best possible use—and that meant teaching. "I knew that my brief experience in the Mexico school had been lacking in something," he says, "and I wanted to do it right."

He began teaching at a local college as well as giving private lessons, and on April 1, 1979, the Revere Academy of Jewelry celebrated its official opening. Located in San Francisco's historic Phelan Building, the school has enjoyed a quarter-century of phenomenal growth while remaining true to its original mission: to teach the art and science of jewelry-making through the traditional Old World guild system.

"What we teach is theory and practice on everything from repair to custom

work to production, because people think they know where they want to go, but it's helpful to have a broad foundation of skills," Revere explains. "For example, if you want to be a designer, you should still learn stone-setting skills so you can look at work someone else is doing and know if it's high quality."

According to Revere, the school pioneered organizing a curriculum around subject areas. "We use the 'sampler' method or 'project' method, in which the student follows along step-by-step with the teacher," he says.

Classes are taught by working professional jewelers, including Revere, who has won international awards for his designs and written several books on jewelry. The faculty includes more than a dozen master craftsmen and experts in a variety of fields. Michael Good, Charles Lewton-Brain, Jean Stark, and Doug Zaruba have been frequent guest instructors for the annual Master's Symposium, and German master gem designer Bernd Munsteiner taught a class in lapidary techniques at Revere. "That was the only class Bernd has ever taught," notes Revere. "Actually, we went to school together in Germany, although he was a few years ahead of me."

The Revere curriculum. Courses at the Revere Academy are designed to prepare students for JA certification examinations. The school offers three diploma programs:

- The Jewelry Technician (JT) program is condensed into 11 classes totaling 235 hours of instruction. It focuses on the essential bench skills needed to enter the field of jewelry fabrication and repair. Tuition for classes is \$4,645 plus \$560 in kit fees, plus additional cost for required tools. This course prepares students for the JA Level One Certified Bench Jeweler Technician test.

- The Jewelry Technician (JT) Intensive program offers the same diploma as the Jewelry Technician program but is 85 hours longer. Tuition costs \$6,250 for 320 hours of instruction; materials kit fees are the same. This course also prepares students for the JA Level One Certified Bench Jeweler Technician test.

- The Graduate Jeweler (GJ) 22-class program covers a range of professional skills as a foundation for a career in jewelry. Course work can be completed either by taking the Jewelry Technician Intensive followed by the additional required classes in the Open Session (545 hours, \$10,975 tuition plus \$1,150 kit fees) or by taking all 22 classes individually during Open Sessions (460 hours, \$9,370 tuition plus \$1,150 kit fees and additional cost for required tools). This course serves as preparation for the JA Level Two Certified Bench Jeweler test.

"We also teach gem cutting occasionally in the Master Symposium, but not lapidary or watches or enameling," adds Revere. "We teach lots of stone setting and gemology, because we want to prepare students for jobs as jewelry-makers—design, rendering, model mold making, casting. This gives them a choice of where to work. Some already know that they're going to run a jewelry store, and they need this knowledge."

A surprising number of students come from far off the jewelry-making track, says Revere: "We have trained corporation presidents, surgeons, teachers, dentists. ... We have one former student, an anesthesiologist, who has cut back his responsibilities at the Mayo Clinic so that he could make jewelry. We've had a vascular surgeon, hand surgeon, eye doctor, dentist—he even keeps a display of his jewelry in his office. We get computer people, office people,

schoolteachers who are phasing out of their careers.... We had a husband and wife in their fifties, a retired engineer and a research scientist. She liked needle arts, and she saw our 10-minute video and wanted to sign up ... and then so did he!"

The students come from every corner of the globe as well as from every sector of the economy. "We put a dot on the map whenever we get a student from someplace new, and we're up to about 50 or 60 countries—Pakistan, the Middle East, all over Europe," Revere says. "In fact, students from Turkey, Japan, and Pakistan just left, and a Swiss master goldsmith came to take two classes."

What all have in common, Revere says, is "passion for the metal. We don't get bored industry types; we get self-motivated entrepreneurial types. About half have some jewelry affiliation or experience—maybe they've worked in a family store or taken classes or they own a store and want to upgrade their skills—but about half are new to jewelry. And we get some who aren't even going to go into the industry."

But those who do enter the jewelry industry put their Revere education to good use. "We have lots of successes—I see the jewelry they make, the awards they win, I see them at trade shows. One took first place, the grand prize of \$20,000, in the Saul Bell competition." Revere graduates have won prizes in other major contests including the Spectrum Awards and De Beers competitions, and graduate Donna Shimazu became the first Hawaiian JA Certified Master Bench Jeweler.

"We get master and beginners, but all I want them to do is use the skills," Revere insists. "I don't care if they're street artists or working in diamonds and platinum. The reward is having something in your hand at the end of the day that has a 1,000-year lifespan. There's no point in rushing, no one knows how fast you work ... they just look at the quality."

The success of the Revere Academy has not been lost on other aspiring teachers. "Six have tried to open [schools based] on my model," says Revere. "In fact, one student, a wealthy Brazilian whose parents funded his school, put out a brochure in Portuguese, describing word for word my classes."

The next 25 years? For many successful businesses, expansion is often the next logical step. But for the Academy, that's out of the question, says Revere: "Things are going just fine now. I do a lot of traveling and teaching in Haystack, Maine, and in Alaska."

In addition, Revere is working on two new books: *AJM* magazine's *Bench Tips for Jewelers* (slated for publication in 2004) and the second book in his "Jewelry Repair" series, *Setting Repairs*. He's also been writing for *JCK* magazine since 1983. "I think I've had a big impact," Revere says of his publications. "It's all about having a dream, following a path, and sometimes not knowing where it goes. My niche is communicating with people who love jewelry." ♦

Interested?

Schedules, information, and a free video tour are available upon request from the Revere Academy of Jewelry Arts, 760 Market St., Suite 900, San Francisco, CA 94102; (415) 391-4179, e-mail: info@revereacademy.com, www.revereacademy.com.