

TASSONI'S METAMORPHOSIS

FROM MODEL TO JEWELRY DESIGNER, ANGELA TASSONI'S CREATIVE VISION CONTINUES TO EVOLVE

by Wendy Sy

For Angela Tassoni, happiness is a view overlooking Central Park West, with natural light and Dave Matthews Band playing in the background. The jewelry designer works best in the familiar surroundings of her studio, where she creates each ornate and oversize necklace of her namesake line by hand.

As a direct descendant of famed poets, painters and nobles of the Italian Renaissance, Tassoni's creativity is deeply rooted in her background. Her father owned a boutique selling custom-made clothing called Tassoni Tailoring at Biltmore Fashion Park in Phoenix, Arizona, where she grew up. Immersed in the idea of fashion, she began modeling for store ads at the age of 14. It was, in part, due to her Audrey Hepburn-like looks that she landed jobs across the globe.

"Models are like gypsies," says Tassoni, who would string together glass beads, gems and found objects from Europe and Asia while on set between photo shoots. "My biggest inspiration, in addition to art and architecture, is nature. I remember driving down to Taliesin West and just loved seeing how the buildings are incorporated right in the middle of the desert," she notes of the Scottsdale winter home and school that belonged to the late architect Frank Lloyd Wright. "That's what I look to do with my jewelry—to create something of meaning that's out of the-box and unpredictable."

At one point, Tassoni lived in Los Angeles, where she sourced materials such as macramé from the '70s, bought at auction. Combining feathers and beads to form necklaces, her designs were picked up at Fred Segal, as well as stores around the city. In 2001, Tassoni moved to New York—where she's currently based—and was discovered by Linda Dresner, a Park Avenue boutique owner at the time. It wasn't long before her

Pendant with emeralds, diamanté crystals, Venetian glass, Swarovski, 18K gold-plated agate and 18K gold-plated sterling silver beads.

Tassoni's fabric-covered jewelry box resembles the style of an antique storybook.

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jewelry-making hobby hit like wildfire and grew into a business, attracting the likes of art patrons such as Beth Rudin DeWoody. "I started collecting different materials as my work expanded, designing around belt buckles, brooches, buttons and the tops of small boxes," she says. On the table next to Tassoni is a selection of her latest work, including necklaces with butterfly motif centerpieces. Each has a clasp that's custom-made with 18K gold-plate or sterling silver,

depending on the coloration of the stones. "I want women to feel unique when they walk into a room wearing these pieces, yet also have each serve as a work of art within itself." For that reason, she created gold, fabric-covered jewelry boxes for each necklace.

Tracing back to her love for nature, Tassoni has been involved in the UK-based charity Cool Earth and was recently named an ambassador. The mission of the nonprofit organization is to work alongside indigenous villages to bring an end to deforestation.

"There's this great book," she says while reaching for her bag, pulling out a copy of *Rainforest: Dispatches from Earth's Most Vital Frontlines* by Tony Juniper. "It's sort of a bible for me." With inspiration abounding,

Tassoni goes on to share her desire to one day create a collection dedicated to raising awareness of environmental protection. This summer, she's traveling throughout Peru with her daughter, Ava Grace. On the itinerary are visits to Lima, Cuzco, and the Peruvian Amazon to source materials for new designs.

And just like the life cycle of a butterfly, each chapter of Tassoni's adventure so far has been a metamorphosis—which makes sense for a free-spirited gypsy soul. ♦

JESSICA NASH