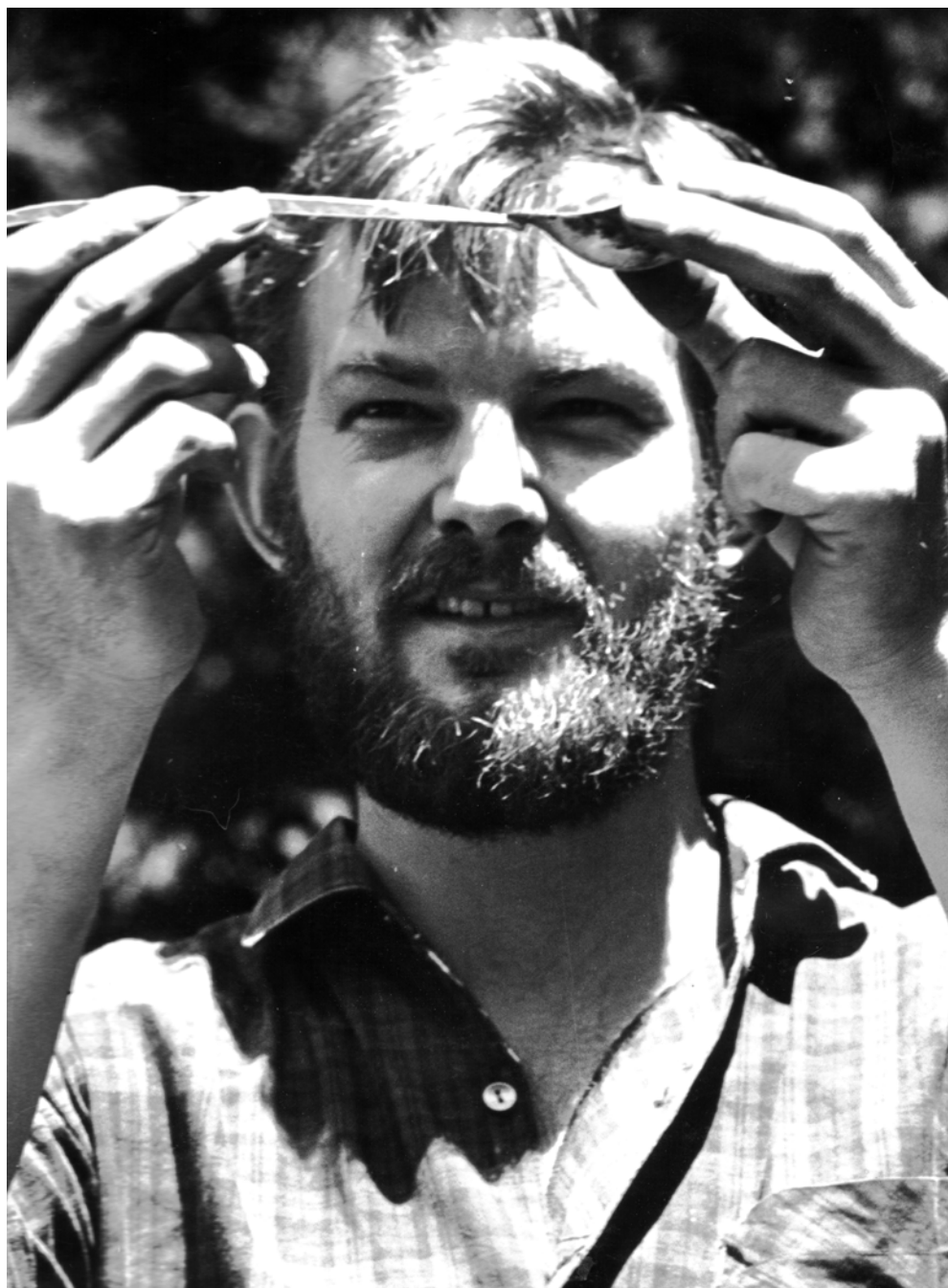


## A LIFE LESS ORDINARY

## Sweet Prince

*Jens Hansen truly lived a life less ordinary. Always a legend in Nelson he was catapulted to super-stardom by The Ring*



In 1962, Jens Hansen, a troublesome student, was sent from his New Zealand chicken farm to Denmark – the land of his birth. Call it an OE if you will...

Signing on as a cargo-ship deck boy, he spent the next six months sidekicking with sailors so salty they would not sink.

This may have been when the swashbuckler in him was born.

He also went to Denmark to learn about jewellery. Along the way, he married a young beautiful Dane, Gurli Winter. They returned to Aotearoa in 1965, and turned his father's chicken coop into a workshop. Ultimately, like from the feathers of a phoenix, arose Jens Hansen Gold & Silversmiths.

The Hansens began attempting something totally new – melding Scandinavian style with Kiwi influences, which created an entirely fresh genre of jewellery. With Gurli assisting, promoting, bookkeeping and selling, Jens was free to fabricate pieces never before conceived in New Zealand. He would soon be known as the grandfather of modern jewellery-making in New Zealand.

*Like the Algonquin Round Table but with more booze, the Hansens' home hosted a virtual who's who of the country's budding and bohemian artists, sculptors, painters and jewellers. There was great food, raucous laughter and copious drink*

Forty years ago, in 1968, they relocated to Nelson and nestled in a great villa on Alton Street. Jens began holding jewellery workshops and taught art at the polytechnic.

With the passage of time, he evolved into a giant mythological figure. He wore his hair like Prince Valiant and sported a full beard. At 6'1", he could be charmingly romantic yet disturbingly daunting. His son, Halfdan, recalls him as "a large Viking charging around smoking, drinking and swearing".

This sort of man commanded an equally large entourage.

Like the Algonquin Round Table but with more booze, the Hansens' home hosted a virtual who's who of the country's budding and bohemian artists, sculptors, painters and jewellers. There was great food, raucous laughter and copious drink.

Jens, at the head of the table, held court and encouraged the creative flow of ideas swirling around the room. Everyone remembers his towering generosity as his finest quality.

But the non-melancholic Dane was nothing like his boring compatriot Hamlet. Everything he did, he did with bravery and passion. He was more aligned with the party animal Yorik – "a fellow of infinite jest... of most excellent fancy".

But Hansen was much more than a jester. At times, he was the king. Before long, he was the reincarnation of the Viking deity Thor, brandishing his small hammer and throwing lightning bolts. He personified ebullience. Being in his audience would etch an indelible image of him on the brain – never to be erased.

A huge fan of The Three Musketeers, he thought of himself as Porthos: "Honest and slightly gullible – the extrovert of the group – enjoying wine, women and song. His eating abilities were impressive. As the story advances, he looks more and more like a giant, and his death is that of a titan."

Oh yeah... and Jens also made that most famous of rings. His youngest son Thorkild (child of Thor?) remembers Jens saying, "Any glorified plumber could do it."

But Jens Hansen was no plumber. He was a Renaissance man, silversmith, traveller, sculptor, painter, epicure, musician, womaniser, raconteur, businessman, voluptuary, sailor, swordsman and teacher.

When he entered the room, the spot that he stood on would become its centre. He was the kind of person that would be loved by both men and woman. If we are very fortunate, we meet a man like Jens Hansen some time in our life, and we are all the better for that meeting.

Hansen died of cancer in 1999. He is currently teaching Valkyrie to forge thunderbolts and wishing he had a proper Viking funeral.

