

LUXURY

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Tayma Page Allies has carved out a sparkling career in gems but the road to success has had major bumps, she tells **Kylie Knott**

Shine

on

Paraiba and tri-colour tourmalines



Tayma Page Allies ignored the odds stacked against her when she went "head first" into the jewellery business 25 years ago. Seeing a gap in the market, the British-born, Hong Kong-based businesswoman set up Tayma, specialising in handmade one-off pieces of jewellery – and she hasn't looked back. "I had no financial backing, no local language skills and no official premises – I just went head first into it."

Sitting in her beautifully decorated flat in Pok Fu Lam, it's obvious she has an eye for both quality and detail – pieces of Asian art and antiques are woven together to form a creative and homely tapestry. But it's the green and turquoise jewellery hanging from her neck, wrists and ears – pieces from her collections – that catch the eye. "A lot of my jewels have been inspired by the Caribbean ocean where I spent time growing up."

Her international upbringing also included schooling in Malta, Trinidad and Britain, and teaching in Nigeria.

In the early '80s, work also took her to Russia and China: "In those days it was a novelty to see a blue-eyed blonde girl."

With just £50 in her pocket, a return ticket to Britain and a small suitcase, Allies decided to stay in Hong Kong. "I had

nowhere to live and no job but was lucky to secure a position with a PR agency handling clients including the Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group.

Things changed in 1990 when, driven by basic mathematics, she entered uncharted territory and set up Tayma Page & Associate. "I won a contract to stage fashion shows in China for French fashion house Montagut, organising models, choreography, advertising, promotion, venue, lighting and so on. I spent three years organising shows in Beijing, Dalian and Shanghai, before realising that 70 per cent of my time was spent on fashion shows for 30 per cent return while 30 per cent of the down time I spent on jewellery was making a 70 per cent return."

Turning her focus to making jewellery was a wise move. Now she is set to reopen her shop in Prince's Building in June and will launch a website (taymajewellery.com) later this month. It will offer ideas for birthstones, anniversary gems, a Chinese zodiac section with exotic gems matched to each year, a gems glossary section, a concierge section and a legacy section where loose stones can be purchased annually and gifted to the next generation to start heritage collections.

Watermelon tourmaline pendant

"Back then you could source jewellery craftsmen and goldsmiths in Hong Kong for very little cost, so I spent weekends redesigning my 21st birthday aquamarine and diamond ring and making pieces for myself. My friends loved them and asked me to make some for them."

"I really loved freshwater pearls – in those days they looked like coloured Rice Crispies – so I had a local man visit farms in China to buy the best quality and I designed beautiful multistrands of seed pearls to wear as necklaces and bracelets, interchangeable into five styles. I always had one around my neck and one in my bag – people loved those pearls and are still wearing them today. It was this seed pearl money of about HK\$10,000 that paid for my gemology lessons, and with which I was able to buy my first gemstones."

After studying gemology for four years – "I was 30 when I went into jewellery full time" – she opened a small shop in Lan Kwai Fong. "In those days, I was a one-man-band making round-the-world trips on United and BA Concorde to take in the main trunk shows in LA, San Francisco, New York, London, Paris, and the

South of France in the summer."

At the time, her sister worked for ABC News, and Allies took advantage of that connection to build a network of clients, including famous US journalist Barbara Walters.

But along the long and sparkling road there have been a few bumps – and lots of tears. "When I was starting out I did a trunk show and put a bag full of gold jewellery on the ground only to have a taxi reverse over it and flatten everything. That wasn't good for cash flow. I cried."

I use only the best diamonds, quality gold, and I never cut corners

TAYMA PAGE ALLIES

A theft in Thailand also turned on the waterworks. "My first collection was handmade in Thailand – the gold and labour was cheaper there than in Hong Kong and there was a plentiful supply of ruby and sapphire cabochons [a gem or bead cut in convex form and highly polished but not faceted]. I sent two parcels of jewellery by Speedpost to London for a trunk show and the driver stole them and ditched the van. Instead of insuring for the correct value of

US\$10,000, the amount had been wrongly entered as US\$1,000. I cried again."

Allies says her jewellery is made with carefully selected gemstones and pearls. "It's impossible to duplicate an original, even if the mounting can be copied. Most imitators copy because they want to offer a cheaper product, but an imitation is always a poor comparison because I use only the best diamonds, quality gold, and experienced goldsmiths – and I never cut corners," says the 58-year-old.

It's this attention to quality that has helped her build a loyal customer base worldwide.

Once, she says, a man called from China looking for a birthday gift for his wife. The man had made a purchase for his wife a few years earlier, so Allies used that insight to craft something to the wife's taste. "Within 24 hours, she had opal and diamond earrings for her birthday in Koh Samui."

On another occasion, a woman arrived from London on Saturday morning, chose the diamond for her engagement ring and they were able to design and craft the ring within six hours. "She flew out at 7pm absolutely delighted."

Her attention to detail – and willingness to take the initiative – are part of the reason for her success.

"You need to have stamina and faith in yourself... and follow your intuition."

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Tayma Page Allies (left); mixed green tourmalines and diamond earrings with green tourmaline mahjong ring (below). Portrait: Franke Tsang



Paraiba tourmaline and rubellite tourmaline mahjong rings



Paraiba and diamonds



Spas for the course

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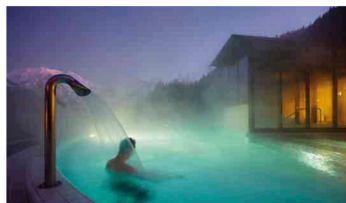
Switzerland is most vividly about enjoying the outdoors: skiing or hiking in the Alps, boat rides on lakes and rivers, or walking and shopping your way through historic towns and cities. Cafes, restaurants and museums can fill rainy or snowy days, but for a culture built on sport and fitness, the indoor complement to the athletic outdoors is the spa.

In the resort town of Lenk, in the Bernese Oberland (Bernese Highlands) – the higher part of the capital Bern – is the Lenkerhof Gourmet Resort. The Lenkerhof has been serving guests who have come to Lenk to "take the waters". You also have a choice of an indoor or outdoor pool (even when the snow falls). On the floor below is the fitness centre.

In the hotel's nachbereich (saunas), there are seven rooms set at temperatures ranging from minus 1 degree Celsius, in the ice grotto, to 85 degrees Celsius in

the Finnish sauna. In other words, you can literally stand naked in a freezer or cook in a wooden skillet, or go back and forth as you please. I was sweating it out in the Finnish sauna when, at precisely 5am, Sara came in, announcing in Swiss German what sounded like an "oof goose" (High German: *aufguss*, meaning "infusion"). Sara poured ice onto the hot stones of the sauna, and then flailed a towel with a whip-

like snap in front of each occupant. The effect was to increase the heat momentarily to about the temperature needed to melt anodised aluminium. A couple of guys could not take the heat and left, with their heads down; the rest of the men stayed in, if only to not be outshone by the only woman present, who was enjoying herself as calmly as if she were sitting beside a fan on a veranda.



The outside pool spa at Lenkerhof Gourmet Spa Resort hotel (above); the thermal bath at B2 Boutique Hotel and Spa (top right).

The Lenkerhof was built over a sulphur spring because sulphur water is believed to alleviate the symptoms of everything from rheumatism to digestive problems – at least it was until Swiss insurers stopped paying for policyholders to take the cure. That caused an immediate cash-flow crisis among hoteliers and clinicians engaged in the ancient trade of offering water that smells like rotten eggs to anyone willing to drink and bathe in it.

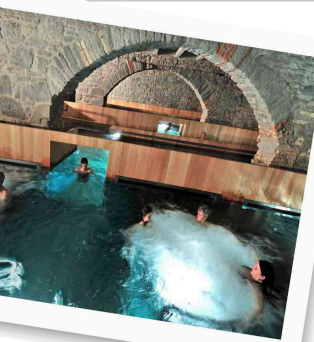
One room in the Lenkerhof's spa is a sulphur grotto, where you can inhale sulphur and drink sulphur water. On your way there, sulphur water sprays you from the ceiling.

The hotel also has Spettacolo, a Relais & Chateaux gourmet restaurant, where Stefan Luene, a native of the Black Forest (also once a cure region that has become a culinary destination), cooks up a six-course antidote to whatever ails that health-inspiring sulphur water might offer you. As good as taking the waters may make you feel, it does not compare with chestnut

cream soup followed by wagyu beef with sweet potatoes and mushrooms, paired with a bottle of Ardolino Duoro (2008).

Next stop is the B2 Boutique Hotel (plus) Spa, in Zurich. The hotel has been elegantly superimposed by the local architectural firm of Althammer-Hochuli upon the main building of a large brewery, which, until 1996, made Huertmann beer. There are beer bottle chandeliers in a lofting bar/library with more than 33,000 books that line shelves ascending far above you. The roof has a year-round outdoor pool, and in the former beer cellars is a so-called art spa.

The Irish-Roman bath, as reimagined in one part of the B2 Spa and at some Swiss mountain resorts, is a multistep experience where you spend a designated amount of time in



assorted hot, tepid and cool baths, in steam rooms, and in different kinds of chill-out zones. The difference at B2 is that you are posted to tell you that you are required to wear a bathing suit, and no one directs you to move rigidly from step to prescribed step. Instead, you are free to graze in your Vilebrequin boxers among the offerings. The basic entry price is modest, and the spa cuisine offered on two floors is healthy and inexpensive. On weekends,

the spa is filled with young couples, snuggling in the warm, bubbly water.

After visiting two fine hotels that feature capacious spas, the whole family was well cleaned and relaxed. Swiss spa lesson five: when doing hotel spas with your kindergartener, leave time for parent-child and adults-only activities. Bring a cloth to clean your glasses: there really is quite a lot to see. Tribune News Service