

## QUICK FACTS

### ZOLTAN DAVID

BEE CAVE, TX

**URL:** [www.zoltandavid.com](http://www.zoltandavid.com)

**OWNERS:** Zoltan and Patti David

**FOUNDED:** 1980

**OPENED FEATURED LOCATION:** 2008

**AREA:** 1,800 square feet  
(880 square-foot showroom)

**ARCHITECT / DESIGN FIRM:** PPDS

**EMPLOYEES:** 5 (3 full-time, 2 part-time)





# ZOLTAN DAVID

BY TRACE SHELTON

**FREEDOM.** To jewelry designer and store owner Zoltan David, it's not a cliché or buzzword — it's something to be pursued relentlessly.

"I'm not a jewelry retailer, I'm a jewelry artist. I'm motivated by what sets me free," he declares. Why, then, would a man who's been recognized as one of the top designers of his era tie himself down to a retail location?

Because, according to David, working directly with consumers brings about the very freedom he craves. "With wholesale, you sometimes have to damp down the extraordinary in favor of mass appeal. But when the consumer asks you to run with a piece, you have many directions available and you can run as far as you want," he says.

And so, after beginning his training as a goldsmith and diamond setter in 1972 and establishing his own designer brand in 1980, David chose to open an appointment-only showroom in 1995. Then, last year, he and his wife of 15 years, Patti, unveiled a public showroom in the new Hill Country Galleria in picturesque Austin, TX.

Like Zoltan, Patti loves retail. "For me, retail is more rewarding than wholesale," she says. "I get to talk to the people who wear the pieces. And I know that our jewelry becomes part of their story."

Under a blue Texas sky and hot Texas sun, a man and a toddler, holding hands, wander the stained-concrete sidewalks of the open-air Galleria. Green trees, vivid flowers, and stately white Hill Country limestone surround them as



jazz music puts shoppers in a buying mood. They stop, pulled in by the oval window displays and the fascinating jewelry held therein.

Welcome to Zoltan David, where even the sleek logo sends a message that this is not your average jewelry store.

The exterior façade is contemporary, formed of multiple pieces of stained wood, but with no hard edges — everything is rounded. The doorway, slightly recessed, entices shoppers to move inside where they'll find cool air and an even cooler jewelry shopping experience.

The first thing one notices is the space: There are no showcases in the middle of the store. The rich brown rosewood floor meshes perfectly with red oak showcases for a luxurious yet unintimidating feel. Above the showroom on the back feature



wall, a distinctive, slashing "Z" crest overlaid by a medieval Hungarian sword speaks of heritage — and at the same time, conjures images of the dashing El Zorro of Mexican tradition.

A large round ottoman covered in leather and cowhide rests smack in the middle of the showroom floor, adding a particularly Austin flavor. An airy silk chandelier floats overhead, matched by drop lights above the wet bar in the corner. They hang from a 16-foot-high barrel ceiling, faced in a natural wood veneer imported from Japan. A hallway at the back leads to a private viewing room, an impressive restroom, and the 500-square-foot shop, the Dancing Metals Studio.

Alcoves to either side of the hallway hold six of Zoltan's past awards. "It feels great to have more awards than alcoves,"



» TRY THIS NATURE SCENE ON A BILLBOARD

ON ONE OF THE MAIN HIGHWAYS leading into the area, there was a section of pristine roadway that was becoming overrun with billboards. Zoltan and Patti contracted one of the larger vacant billboards and put up a picture of a blue sky with clouds and simply wrote: “Courtesy of Zoltan David.” For the

first few months the billboard was up, they had people coming into the store every week thanking them. They are trying to start a movement in the area to beautify the billboards and make them objects of art while still conveying a marketing message to the public.

he laughs. The jewelry that earned those awards rests glowing in the showcases to either side of the gallery. Every piece is distinctive, little resembling anything a customer might have seen elsewhere. This only heightens the sense that one is actually browsing an art gallery.

For a typical retail jewelry model, this space might seem constraining. At Zoltan David, it feels refreshingly spacious. By shopping here, a customer is doing something special — something to be remembered.

### PERSONAL CONNECTION

In a silk shirt, jeans, and black leather boots, Zoltan David is the consummate Austinite. He appears relaxed, yet he chafes at being away from his sketchpad or bench for too long. Seated next to him, Patti, wearing a casual black dress, is friendly and effortlessly elegant.

As they discuss the process that brought their store and jewelry to life, they complement each other perfectly — Patti gives motion to retail sales and operations, while Zoltan focuses primarily on his design work. Both have a vision for the business, and both are creative (Zoltan designed the store’s exterior, while Patti is responsible for the look and feel of the showroom itself).

Zoltan is dedicated to design and

jewelry work. “For me, the creation process is my lifeblood,” he says. “It’s a two-edged sword: It brings me satisfaction *and* dissatisfaction. It imprisons and liberates me at the same time.”

He is a true Hungarian, born in Budapest, the son of an engineer and a cake decorator. “So, jewelry is a perfect fit for me,” he says, “part engineering and part fantasy.”

And although he’s lived in Vancouver and Laguna Beach, CA, he’s also a true Texan. “I love Texas. The most powerful characteristic of Texas is its independence,” he says. “I hold

individuality in very high regard.”

This value system is, perhaps, part of what attracted him to Patti, a native Texan, in the first place. “Patti and I bounce things off each other. That division of expertise helps us work very well together,” he says.

With more designs on the horizon, a newly minted Coolest Store, and a house on the lake, life is good for the Davids. But it hasn’t always been easy.

“It’s a huge challenge to be an independent business owner,” Zoltan says. “You have to walk a path that only you can walk. The independence, though, is well worth the price.”



The Hill Country Galleria lifestyle center provides a small-town, main-street atmosphere.



## 5 COOL THINGS

### DOORS OF DELIGHT

**1** Zoltan David features not one, but two, of the most interesting doors in the country. The front door, designed by David himself, has so much glass as to resemble a window itself, with thin lines of wood crisscrossing in weblike fashion. The door leading from the showroom to the shop was the front door of the store's last location, and the Alice In Wonderland concept comes courtesy of a Manhattan woodworking artist.

### FULL OF EMPTINESS

**2** Space: the final frontier of jewelry store design? The Davids thought so, constructing a showroom with plenty of empty space in the middle, which makes it feel more like an art gallery than a jewelry store.

### WOODEN COUNTENANCE

**3** Wood connotes warmth and natural beauty, both qualities that the Davids cherish. As such, the Zoltan David showroom features not one but *five* different types of wood, including Brazilian rosewood (floors), Spanish cedar (bar, molding and doors), mahogany (ceiling), red oak (showcases), and Texas mesquite (consultation room desk). They've received so many positive customer comments on the wood scent that they changed their minds about adding aromatherapy.

### EXTREME VISUALS

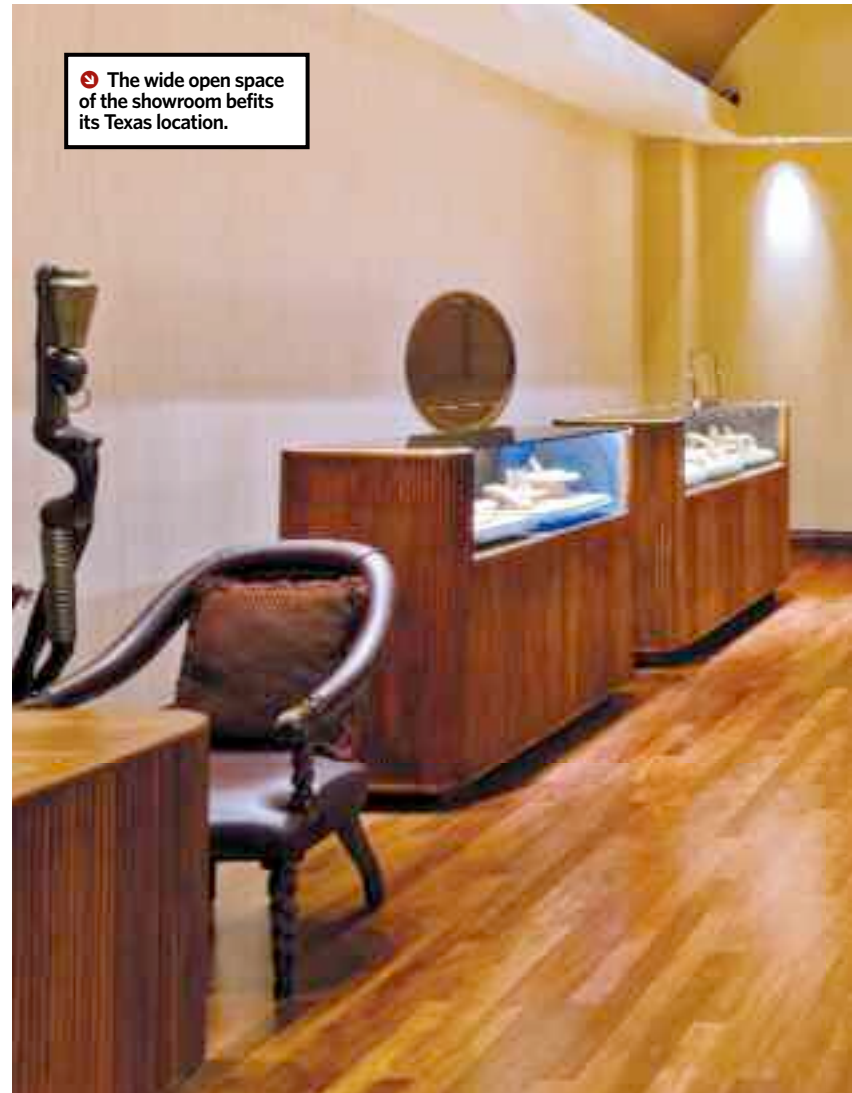
**4** Like many jewelry stores, Zoltan David features a flat-screen TV, but the footage customers watch here is far different from what they might see elsewhere:

# ZOLTAN DAVID

extreme water sports, and Discovery Channel's "The Planet" series. Both are incredibly visual and have nothing to do with jewelry ... which works quite well, actually. "These are things people like to watch," Zoltan says. "And it's enjoyable even without sound."

## DESIGNED TO SUCCEED

**5** Zoltan David was a world-renowned designer before he ever opened a retail space. His dozens of awards include being the first designer in the history of the JA Show to win both New Design Talent and New Designer of the Year (1994), multiple AGTA Spectrum Awards, and being selected as one of the Top 100 Designers of the past 30 years in a poll conducted by *National Jeweler* (2007). His latest honor was winning "Best of Silver" in *National Jeweler* for his Gypsy Bracelet (April 2009).



# THE COOLEST OF 'EM ALL



**6** Patti and Zoltan David divvy up their expertise.

# WHAT THE JUDGES SAY

**STEVE SAMARAS:** The Davids have created the perfect store. They've combined impeccably designed jewelry, exquisite materials for the store's interior and have created marketing and promotional events that embody sheer excellence.

**PENNY PREVILLE:** Patti and Zoltan have mastered the use of open space and created an environment that is simple, yet elegant. Everything about their gallery is unique and one-of-a-kind. The imported woods and the Fortuny chandelier and lighting give the store a warm and inviting feeling.

**MICHAEL WHISTON:** The handcrafted wooden interiors and exteriors of Zoltan David make for a unique and inviting retail space. It is clear that much labor and expense went into the design and fabrication of the entry doors, display cases and furniture. The large-scale open wooden interiors of Zoltan David fit well with the aesthetic of the Austin hill country where they are located.

## SCORECARD

STORY	72.5%
INTERIOR	71.7%
EXTERIOR	78.3%
MARKETING	70.0%
WEBSITE	61.7%
INDIVIDUALITY	73.3%
<b>OVERALL SCORE</b>	<b>72.6%</b>

**TIM MALONE:** From the front door, this store says get ready for a new and more exciting jewelry experience. This store understands that jewelry is all about selling fashion and design and they know how to do it with great style.

**CLIFFORD PUGH:** Owners Zoltan and Patti David break the rules by showcasing empty space. The Davids do a great job of mixing upscale features with homey touches, including a flat-screen TV and the family dog, a wolf hybrid named, appropriately, Cash.



**A bar and flat-screen television provide touches of home.**