



Kingsley Wallman & Genevieve Lilley

GEMOLOGIST AND ARCHITECT TEAM BEHIND BESPOKE JEWELLERS VENERARI

Architect Genevieve Lilley, 40, is amazed to find she's winning awards as a jewellery designer but her corporate lawyer-turned-gemologist husband Kingsley Wallman, 43, knew she could do it: "I put gemstones in front of her and instinctively she has an idea."

"The famous architect Louis Kahn says a brick will tell you what it wants to be. Gemstones do the same," adds Lilley.

The stylish pair sits in their spacious jewellery design and architecture studio in Sydney's Strand Arcade. Downstairs, their jewel box of a showroom, Venerari, sparkles with Lilley's designs. And you won't find a white diamond in sight – the favoured stone here is Australian opal.

Wallman's passion can be traced to his father, who swapped medicine for mining in the 1970s when he struck a rich opal vein in Queensland. Teenage Wallman spent holidays grading opals but later opted for a legal career, scaling the corporate ladder at Britain's Cable & Wireless.

Lilley, meanwhile, was made senior

associate with London's David Chipperfield Architects, taking on projects including museums and Dolce & Gabbana stores.

After meeting and marrying, the couple transferred to San Francisco in 2002. The following year, Sebastian was born. Fed up with the corporate world, Wallman realised he didn't want to be a "distant father like my father" and he and Lilley decided to return to Sydney and reinvent opal jewellery.

Wallman soon qualified as a gemologist and Lilley used her finely honed aesthetic to design sculptural shapes and geometric patterns for Venerari's 2004 opening. Lilley-designed jewellery took first and second prizes in the Opal Design category of Australia's 2006 Jewellery Design Awards.

Since the arrival of Charmian, now 3, they have juggled family, Venerari's success and Lilley's thriving architecture practice. "We both like to fit just one more thing into the day," Lilley laughs.

Toni Eatts