

# Holly Yashi— Living the American Dream

by Jessica Bounds

The spirit of American enterprise is alive and well in the tiny Redwood Coast community of Arcata, California—one of the West’s most remote places. For the past 30 years, Holly Yashi, purveyor of handcrafted jewelry, has been building a business on the time-honored tradition of hiring local people to create a high-quality product. The company now serves more than 1,100 retailers located all across the nation. Their customers include the likes of Anthropologie and Sundance, as well as boutiques, art galleries and private collectors.

A willingness to think outside the box provided the genesis for the company thirty years ago. Back in 1981 Holly Hosterman and Paul “Yashi” Lubitz were recent graduates of Humboldt State, the local college. Hosterman, a second generation Arcata native, had a degree in art with an emphasis in jewelry making. Lubitz was eager to start a business. “I was sort of a professional student,” he said. “I had a degree in music, a master’s in industrial technology and a couple of teaching credentials. I would have done anything,” he recalled. “Holly said, ‘Well, if you want to start a jewelry business, I’ll join you.’”

A kitchen table served as the design department. The production facility was a single-car garage. At first Hosterman produced silver and brass earrings with animal motifs. Then she became intrigued with titanium because of its unusual ability to accept and retain color. Lubitz did some research and discovered titanium was used in aircraft manufacturing. “I was from San Diego. My dad lived down there and was able to get scrap pieces from General Dynamics. So he’d ship that up to us. By applying color, Holly created truly unique pieces. Then, the real breakthrough came when we found niobium. It’s a much friendlier metal in many, many ways. That’s what we use now.”

When sheets of niobium are dipped in an electrically charged bath, the refractory metal flashes into hues of rich, permanent color. It can also receive a secondary, hand-applied coloring treatment. The resulting colors are more vibrant than those evidenced in titanium. Unlike titanium, niobium does not require acid to retain its color. So, it’s kinder to the environment. It’s more malleable possessing properties much like silver, and it’s inert. “It’s naturally hypo-allergenic. Ninety-nine percent of people can wear our



Above: Lubitz and Hosterman today. Left: The business partners circa 1981.



Fern Canyon near Arcata

jewelry without any reaction at all,” Lubitz explained noting that “niobium is used in surgical staples and implants.” Despite the fact that niobium cost more than titanium, Hosterman and Lubitz were smitten with its potential. “It was worth it,” Lubitz said.



The Holly Yashi store in Arcata

offshore. We are very fortunate in that our products are small and light and we have regional air service. SkyWest makes it possible for us to do what we do and still live here.”

Both founders are active in day-to-day operations. Hosterman continues as creative director. Lubitz remains CEO. They are still enthusiastic about life along the Redwood Coast and cite the family atmosphere at their company as reflective of Arcata’s small-town appeal. “We’re very rural here. It’s pretty isolated. I think there may be 120,000 people in all the county,” Hosterman noted that Humboldt County is the state’s longest and encompasses spectacular scenery. “I have redwoods in my backyard,” she said. “The temperate climate is also very appealing. We never have to worry about getting snowed-in and there’s a lot to see and do. Fly-fishing is excellent. There are six rivers in the county, so you can kayak or go rafting. The ocean is beautiful. There are miles of beaches if you want to get away from it all. Trinidad, north of Arcata is a gentrified fishing village. Trinidad Head Trail offers an easy hike with great ocean views. I also like to take people to Ferndale, a very quaint and authentic Victorian village. And, then there are the redwoods and Fern Canyon. Outdoor activity is big all year-round.”

“At the same time because about half the town is in some way associated with the college there’s a great energy—there’s theater, music, all the arts. With SkyWest service we’re just an hour away from San Francisco if we want to get to a big city,” Lubitz said.

Holly Yashi recently earned a spot on the tourism rosters. The company opened a retail store last March. In addition to displaying the entire Holly Yashi collection—more than 1,000 pieces in all—it features viewing areas where patrons can watch the jewelry being made. “We start with a raw sheet of metal and we do everything right here. We really do make something. That’s a very good feeling. Soon we hope to give tours,” Lubitz said. “It’s been amazing. We have loyal fans come from all over the country. After 30 years in business, it’s nice to know we have a solid following.” ■



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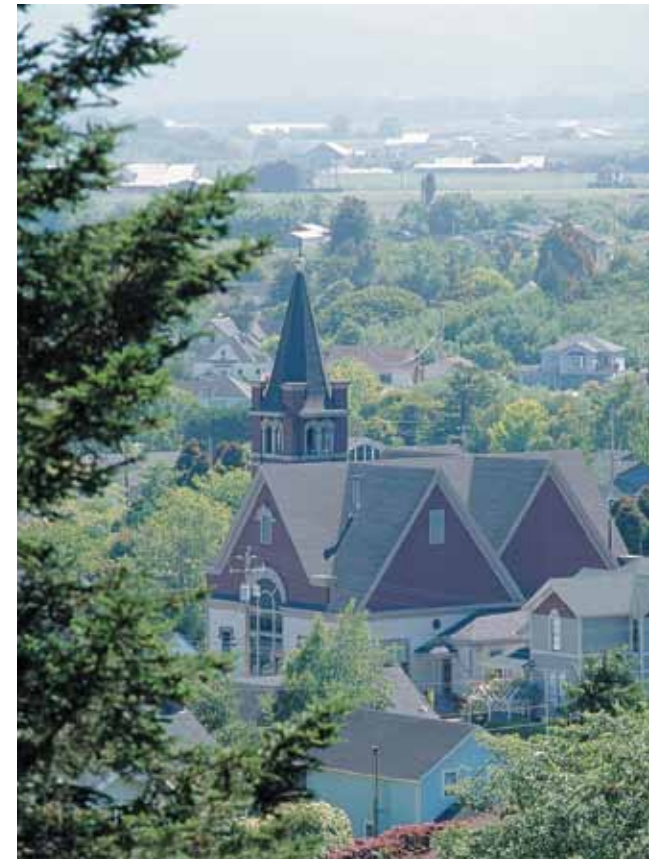
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Ferndale

## DID YOU KNOW

- Ferndale, 27 miles south of Arcata on Highway 101, is known as the most perfectly preserved Victorian village in all of California. The drive is enchanting, too. Arcata is home to a number of well-maintained Victorian homes. A special tour map directs visitors to 20 historic home sites dotting the hillside. Walking offers a brisk workout. It takes about 45 minutes to drive the route.
- The Arcata Plaza is home to the county's largest farmers market, held every Saturday through November. This is the place to find gorgeous flowers, fresh local produce and local arts and crafts. Pastels on the Plaza, held October 1 this year, adorns the sidewalks with beautiful, albeit ephemeral, artwork.
- Arcata's Minor Theater, built in 1914, is among the oldest U.S. movie houses still in operation. In addition to first-run features, it also hosts the Humboldt Film Festival, a salute to independent short films held each spring.
- A trip through the redwoods is a must for every Arcata Visitor. Make sure to visit Fern Canyon in Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park for a magical other-worldly experience. For specific features of the area national and state parks check out [www.nps.gov/redw](http://www.nps.gov/redw). ■

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