



Italian luxury jewelry designer Roberto Coin poses with Forsythe Jewelers owners Debbie Berling (left) and Andrea Bragg.



# A PASSION FOR FASHION

BY LANCE HANLIN | PHOTO BY ARNO DIMMLING

MEET THE MAN BEHIND THE ICONIC  
ROBERTO COIN BRAND

**W**orking as a young servant at a posh Swiss hotel, Venetian-born Roberto Coin was constantly surrounded by affluent people. Determined to become one of them, he climbed the hospitality industry's ranks, eventually purchasing a 4-star luxury inn and restaurant. At the age of 33, he sold his successful businesses to pursue his true passion – jewelry design. He started his company in 1977 in Vicenza, Italy, the gold and jewelry center of Europe. He began producing collections on behalf of some of the most prestigious brands of international fine jewelry.

After years of dreaming of his own brand, he made it a reality in 1996. Eighteen years later, the Roberto Coin brand ranks at the very top of the fine jewelry world. His collections are celebrated around the world and are synonymous with luxury, style and elegance. From unique \$1 million pieces to more practical jewelry in the \$300 range, Coin strives to make his collections accessible to every woman.

On Oct. 23, the iconic designer made a special appearance at Forsythe Jewelers on Hilton Head Island. To celebrate the occasion, the Forsythe team transformed its showroom at The Shops at Sea Pines Center into a Roberto Coin boutique, with many of his collections and some one-of-a-kind pieces on display. Coin arrived at the store 30 minutes before his four-hour meet-and-greet wearing a slick navy suit and fashionable blue-rimmed glasses.

After greeting owner Debbie Berling and the Forsythe staff, he sat down with an espresso and Hilton Head Monthly to talk about his passion for fashion and other interests.

**Hilton Head Monthly:** Is this your first time visiting Hilton Head Island?

**Roberto Coin:** First time.

**HHM:** What are your plans here, other than meeting and greeting all of the customers who have come to see you here today?

**RC:** Nothing else. Unfortunately, this is a very short trip. I'm leaving tomorrow morning. That is the story of my life. I've visited 107

countries all over the world, but I don't really know the world. I meet a lot of people but I don't have the time to take in the beauty of places. From the plane, it looks very similar to Venice. You have a magnificent lagoon here.

**HHM:** You are here to promote your latest jewelry collections, including the Pois Moi Collection. What does Pois Moi even mean?

**RC:** Pois means dot. Moi means myself.

**HHM:** That would explain all the little dots on all of the Pois Moi pieces.

**RC:** In the olden days, it seemed every fashion designer – Versace, Valentino –

used to do a lot of Pois and had their own dots. I wanted my own dots. It is a very simple collection that is very well made. This style has never been introduced in the jewelry world before. Young, old – everybody is liking it.

**HHM:** I know Oprah Winfrey is a big fan. You seem to be the brand of choice for the rich and famous. Do you have any good celebrity stories you can share?

**RC:** When you speak in a private setting, sometimes you say things you wouldn't want to share with the rest of the world. I keep those conversations very, very private (smiles).

**HHM:** Your brand sits at the very top of the jewelry world. What do you attribute that to?

**RC:** There are many, many things that have made us successful. I created this brand in a different manner. Most people launch a brand and follow a system, a system to dress everybody the same. We want to dress everybody differently. Nobody has done it my way before. I've been lucky because I never went to school for design or anything like that. I didn't get started manufacturing until I was in my 30s. I knew two things – I

wanted to make beautiful design and I wanted it to be a good quality product. I didn't have anything else in mind.

**HHM:** You only do a handful of store appearances each year. Why did you choose this location?

**RC:** I've known

Debbie for many years. She has been asking me to come for five or six years. I've wanted to come but it's very difficult. This year, we were able to come. She has a very nice store here. Everybody knows me because I go to even the smallest stores to try and help them out. Unfortunately, I'm also one of the few (founding designers) that is still alive.

**HHM:** How involved are you in the creative process these days?

**RC:** Ninety percent. I'm involved in everything. I don't design, but I sketch.

**HHM:** You come from the epicenter of style and creativity. As far as fashion goes,

how far behind are we here in the United States?

**RC:** We don't like to judge. Americans are traveling more and more and are being exposed to more. All of the top international brands can now be found in the United States. I think you want to be different. You had the choice to be similar to the Europeans. The fact that you are not similar is not because you don't understand it. You probably don't want to do it. That is a much different topic (laughs).

**HHM:** Is there a collection you are most proud of?

**RC:** Appassionata will go down in the history books because we invented a new way of manufacturing with it. Like Pois Moi, it is extremely simple and elegant. I fall in love with all of our designs, especially future designs. I feel our best design is yet to come.

**HHM:** Do you live a luxurious life?

**RC:** Everyone interprets luxury in a different manner. My manner is to do whatever I want to with whoever I want to, family and friends. I don't live a luxurious life. I live an extremely happy life.

**HHM:** What kind of car do you drive?

**RC:** I have an Audi A8 but I don't really drive it. I've had all of the cars I've ever wanted but now they are not important to me. I'm very much into planes, YouTube, Facebook and all sorts of rubbish.

**HHM:** What other hobbies do you have?

**RC:** I love interior design. My house has been in Architectural Digest. I also love to create fashion (shows a photo of Alicia Keys wearing a dress he made for her). I love good food, good wine and I love watching all sports, even American football.

**HHM:** What music do you listen to?

**RC:** Opera, of course.

**HHM:** Every designer has his or her own style. Your signature is a small ruby hidden inside of each piece touching the skin. What is the story behind that?

**RC:** It is a secret gift of good wishes to the woman wearing it. According to an ancient belief, wearing a ruby close to your skin promotes long life, health and happiness.

**HHM:** You said you have traveled all over the world. Of all the places you've been, where is your favorite location?

**RC:** Back home in Italy. You fall in love with different places at different ages for different reasons. At this point in my life, there is no place I would rather be than Italy. **M**

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