

A young boy with brown hair and a dark jacket is holding a highly reflective, gold-colored ring. The ring's surface is curved and acts as a mirror, reflecting a panoramic view of a movie set. In the reflection, several people in costumes are visible, along with studio equipment and bright lights. The boy's face is blurred in the background, and he is looking directly at the camera with a focused expression. He is wearing a watch on his left wrist and a ring on his right hand.

# THE ONE RINGMASTER

*In small-town Nelson, New Zealand, Salvador Dali-lookalike Halfdan Hansen and his brother Thorkild make rings that shine all the way to the movie screen. The Danish Hansen family had the almighty mission of creating perhaps the world's most sought after ring: The One Ring.*

WORDS LARS COLLIN PHOTO MAURO RONGIONE

**JENS HANSEN WAS** brought up in the little Danish town of Odense, home of Hans Christian Andersen. Like the great fairy tale writer, Mr Hansen and his family chose to leave their poor home district in Denmark. But Jens Hansen went much further. Life was hard in post war Denmark so in 1952 the family, including the 12-year-old Jens, sailed over the oceans to finally reach the vast islands of New Zealand.

Years later, back in Denmark during the swinging sixties, the now 22-year-old learnt from great Scandinavian masters how to make jewels glitter and shine. Hansen then returned to New Zealand where his newfound knowledge and skills were much appreciated, and he opened his first little workshop in 1968. The Jens Hansen Gold and Silversmith Workshop was a haven for the arts and craft people and all kinds of bohemian personalities. There they gathered around him in the front room of the Jens Hansen family home at Alton Road in the harbour and craft town of Nelson.

Since those days handmade jewellery designed in New Zealand is a sure sign of quality. It was no surprise that the famous director Peter Jackson first went to his own home country to look for the best gold and silversmith to create one of the most important items for his forthcoming blockbuster, *The Lord of the Rings*.

The assignment went of course to the house of Hansen. Sadly, Jens Hansen died of cancer in 1999, but even if he was not able to witness the global success of the films, he made all important sketches prior to the film's release, together with his youngest son Thorkild.

The work was then fulfilled by his sons Halfdan and Thorkild Hansen who run the business, a combined shop and workshop, based in a rather brutal building from the early 70s, close to Port Nelson at the northern tip of New Zealand's south island.

"My father's design was influenced by his Danish roots and early years, but his training was in Denmark and New Zealand and his later work reflected his time in both countries.

As well as completing his traditional jeweller's apprenticeship, Jens took a variety of art and design related classes in New Zealand and Denmark during the sixties. Later in the mid-70s he won a prestigious Commonwealth travel and study scholarship to Denmark and studied for a formal year at the Goldsmiths High School in Copenhagen," says Halfdan

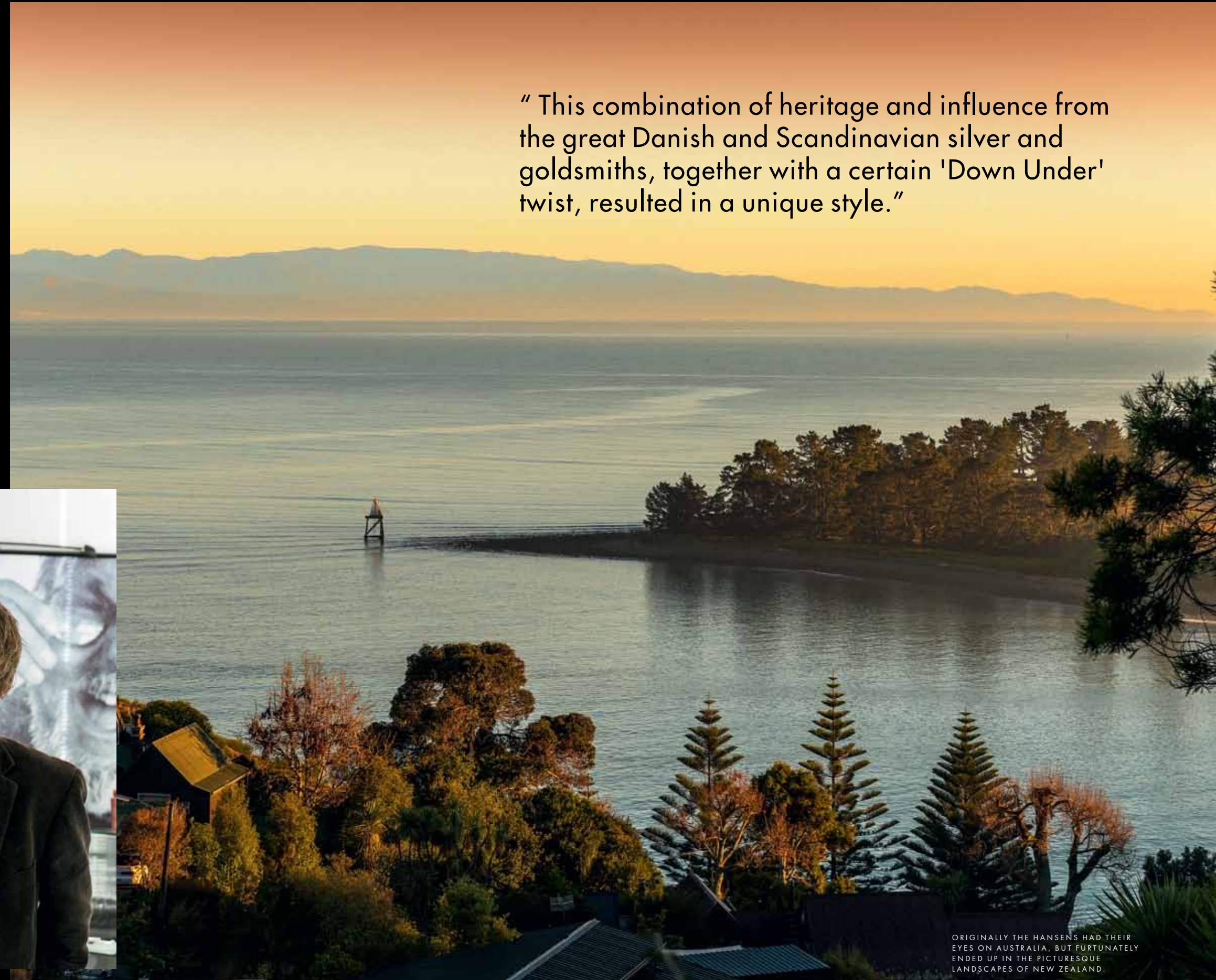
Hansen while fiddling his Dali moustasche.

This combination of heritage and influence from the great Danish and Scandinavian silver and goldsmiths, together with a certain 'Down Under' twist, resulted in a unique style. Even when Jens finished his jewellery training and started making his own business, he concentrated more on a sort of modern craft style.

"My father quickly became one of the founders of craft jewellery here in New Zealand. So basically, to keep a long story short, by the time Peter Jackson looked for someone to make 'The Ring', they came straight to my father. Because he was the supreme modern ringmaker in New Zealand."

**SINCE THE GREAT** success of the Peter Jackson movies, and the complete obsession regarding the "prreecious" ring, Jens Hansen Contemporary Gold & Silversmith find themselves on the tourist trail on things-to-do in Nelson.

"Now, more than ten years later, with the Hobbit movie coming out, we have a new generation arriving who were almost too young for the first films. Today, the regular jewellery busi-



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ORIGINALLY THE HANSENS HAD THEIR EYES ON AUSTRALIA, BUT FORTUNATELY ENDED UP IN THE PICTURESQUE LANDSCAPES OF NEW ZEALAND.



INFLUENCED BY THEIR FATHER, THE BROTHERS HANSEN TEND TO FAVOUR THE MINIMALIST ELEGANCE OF SCANDINAVIAN DESIGN.

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ness is really having a hard time. What is different for us, is that we have quite a distinctive style. It may look familiar for Scandinavians but is still quite unusual for the Americans and British. A lot of other jewellers in New Zealand have gone out of business because a lot of work went to factories in China and the rest of Asia. We’ve been lucky to keep the traditional skills going strong. Probably over half of our visitors are from outside Nelson,” Halfdan says.

**UNLIKE TRADITIONAL JEWELLERS**, Jens Hansen Contemporary Gold & Silversmith is fortunate enough to have three main areas of work. First their classic Jens Hansen design pieces. Then the ‘Movie Ring’ and all related concepts from The Lord of the Rings, and finally custom designed wedding and engagement rings – both traditional and contemporary. “And of course it’s great for us to say that we made the world’s most famous ring,” Halfdan says, before showing us some sketches that his father Jens and brother Thorkild made in the late 90s.

All together they made 15 different bands. But finally they ended up with one that encapsulates the simplicity, elegance and power of the ring described in JRR Tolkien’s classic books.

“For a long time we were only making non branded replicas of the ring, because we had no official rights from the movie. But about two years ago we made a joint venture and now we have an official Jens Hansen ring with magic writing on it. In the movie there was no writing on it, and in the books it is described as a “smooth” ring. But a lot of people want their ring with the writing,” Halfdan explains.

The basic entry level for the official souvenir ring starts at € 100. At the other end is the 8-karat gold ring at about € 2000.

“We probably sell one or two a day of the souvenirs. People find us at the homepage so we have customers from all over the world – actually all the way to Greenland. The fact that we created this ring makes us a lot more credible, which is good for our reputation”, Halfdan says with a contented smile.



THE COMBINED SHOP AND STUDIO NEAR THE HARBOUR OF NELSON, NEW ZEALAND.



AT DERISTEM ME MAION VIRISQUEME ERVIRMIS HOSTIAE ARTAM UTUM TE CONONSI.



**JENS HANSEN CONTEMPORARY GOLD & SILVERSMITH**

The New Zealand jewellery studio/shop is located at 320 Trafalgar Square, Nelson, New Zealand.

Website: [www.jenshansen.com](http://www.jenshansen.com)

The founder, Jens Hansen, was born in Denmark in 1940 and moved with his parents to New Zealand in 1952. He had his first solo exhibition at New Vision gallery in Auckland in 1960. Returning to Denmark and Copenhagen in the early 60s Hansen worked at A. Michelsen, the Court Jewellers, and at the small Borup workshop. He also attended night courses at the School of Applied Arts & Industrial design in Copenhagen. He moved to Nelson in 1968 to open Jens Hansen Gold & Silversmith Workshop. In 1973 he moved the Workshop to its present site in a modernistic building at Trafalgar Square. Two years later Jens Hansen received the Queen Elizabeth Arts Council travel grant. He died on the 10th of August 1999.

