



ALFREDO J. MOLINA

Alfredo J. Molina has dedicated his life to the service of others. Through his company's generous sponsorship of local and national charities, he seeks to improve the lives of those less fortunate. Gratitude, selflessness, love, and a firm belief in sharing compose the Molina way of life.

Alfredo J. Molina is chairman and CEO of the MOLINA Group, Molina Fine Jewelers, based in Phoenix, Arizona, and Black, Starr & Frost, based in California, America's first jeweler, established in 1810. His lineage of master jewelers dates back to seventeenth-century Italy.

Alfredo was born in Santa Clara, Cuba, in 1959. Eight years later, when the revolution forced the Molina family to flee the grip of communism, he settled in Chicago, where he learned the diamond and gemstone business from his grandfather. He came to Phoenix in 1980 with a dream of starting his own jewelry store, which came true in 1987.

Since its opening, Molina Fine Jewelers has built an unparalleled reputation, offering the rarest of gems and exclusive collections of fine jewelry. Arizona Business magazine has voted Molina Fine Jewelers first among jewelers in the state since 1998. When clients come into his salon, they are warmly greeted at the door and welcomed inside as if they were entering the home of friends. If it's hot outside, they are given a cool, moist towel to refresh themselves. If it's chilly, they are presented with a warm towel. They are then offered the finest chocolates or a piece of fresh fruit and the liquid refreshment of their choice. The atmosphere is one of refinement and relaxation. "We are not just in the jewelry business; we are in the emotion business," says Alfredo. "We are about the experience of buying fine jewelry. We do everything within our power to make that experience unforgettable."

This is especially true when it comes to buying fine diamonds. Alfredo recognizes the unique aura that diamonds possess when it comes to creating a quintessential and memorable moment. He knows that it is a moment to be savored and enjoyed. "You can ask any woman about the moment she received her first diamond and she will give you a step-by-step account of that encounter. It is the most emotionally charged gift that a woman can receive or experience," says Alfredo. "Therefore, we will do whatever is necessary to heighten that experience."

Molina Fine Jeweler's reputation for magnificent craftsmanship, value beyond price, and uncompromising discretion has made it welcome in international circles of nobility and influence. The company has drawn the notice of private clients around the world, who often call for consulting and commission work. "As a private jeweler, we practice the old-world tradition of: 'Have jewels, will travel.' While we welcome clients to visit us at our salon, we are just as delighted to pay a visit to them wherever they might be," says Alfredo. "The people we serve become the center of our universe and we strive to make that experience, no matter where in the world it is, unforgettable."

Alfredo's education and experience in the jewelry industry is extensive. He is a graduate gemologist of the Gemological Institute of America (GIA), master gemologist appraiser from the American Society of Appraisers, and a fellow member of the Gemological Association of Great Britain. He is an expert in the determination of country of origin of gemstones. He has served as president of the American Society of Appraisers, the Arizona Jewelers Association, and the GIA Alumni Association. He is a qualified appraiser for the Internal Revenue Service and an alumnus of the FBI Citizens Academy.

Alfredo devotes his time and many resources to the Arizona community. By staying in constant contact with the community, he feels that Molina Fine Jewelers is fulfilling a duty to its friends and supporters. Alfredo and his wife, Lisa, have chaired numerous charity events, including the Arizona Cancer Ball, the Samaritan Foundation Gala, the Symphony Ball, the Arizona Heart Ball, Crohns and Colitis, the Women of Distinction Gala, and Childhelp, Drive the Dream Gala.

Alfredo's list of community affiliations runs long, including the Arizona State University Presidents Club and the Dean's Council 100, University of Arizona President's Club, University of Arizona Health Sciences Center, Arizona Baseball Charities, Fiesta Bowl Committee, Boys & Girls Club, the Banner Foundation, the American Jewish Committee, and the Phoenix Art Museum.

In December 2005, Alfredo was honored in Washington, DC, as one of seven caring Americans and inducted into the Frederick Douglass Museum and Hall of Fame for Caring Americans on Capitol Hill. In 2008, he was inducted into the Jewelers Hall of Fame.

That's the Way I Like It

I think it is rare to conduct an interview and end up singing KC and the Sunshine Band's song "That's the Way (I Like It)," but that is exactly what

happened when I met with Alfredo Molina. After singing a few lines, we both laughed and realized this song perfectly describes Alfredo and his wife Lisa's charitable endeavors.

When I first met Alfredo in 2005, he was being inducted into the Caring Institute's Hall of Fame. As his biography was being read, the list of his accomplishments in the philanthropic world was staggering. Alfredo and his wife Lisa were donating to 167 charities. According to best practices, that was about 164 too many. However, when you meet and talk to Alfredo, you learn of his passion to give back and realize that contributing to many, many nonprofit organizations and charities is the way he likes it.

Today, Alfredo, his wife, and their foundation support over 195 nonprofit organizations.

I wondered where this passion for being supportive of others came from and asked Alfredo. He began by telling me his life's story. Alfredo was born in Cuba into a family of very renowned jewelers. His great grandfather was called the Golden Bull because he was not only a jeweler but also a cattle baron. Alfredo said, "I will never forget the first time I touched real gold. I had already worked my second year as a jeweler's apprentice under my grandfather's strict and demanding tutelage. My grandfather was from the old school where you never completed any task in a manner that met his approval! This was a Molina family tradition dating back some 400 years to my silversmith predecessors in Milan, Italy. That is, the oldest grandson learned the craft of fine jewelry manufacturing starting as a bench apprentice. My grandfather came to my mother on my birthday and simply said, 'Let me take the boy.' At the age of eight, my career as a jeweler began in early March of 1967."

Just a few months prior, Alfredo's family had fled Cuba. They emigrated to America and lived in a tiny apartment in Chicago. "Times were tough," as Alfredo told me. His father worked as a pipe cutter from 7 am to 3 pm and then worked nights as a janitor at Northwestern University to ensure the family had what it needed. This was a very different lifestyle for a man who had owned several hotels, restaurants, and a casino in Cuba before the communists confiscated his assets. It should be noted that Alfredo's father had left the jewelry business at the age of 25 when he developed irreconcilable differences with Alfredo's grandfather.

Times were tough during his work with his grandfather. As Alfredo told me, "The wooden jeweler's bench where I began my career was not built for comfort. It was a drafty space with thick wood floors where your toes were

cold in the winter and your brow dripped sweat in the summer. I spent those first two years, every day after school, working amongst some 125 master jewelers, most of whom were in their 40s, all of us hunched over rows and rows of benches. These craftsmen created one-of-a-kind collections made of the finest metals and gemstones in the world and their designs were represented by the most exclusive jewelry firms of the time.” Alfredo began learning his craft by taking pennies and rolling them flat to learn how to work the metal by engraving, shaping, sawing, and bead setting. He says he used pennies because they were plentiful as a learning tool as well as because copper has many of the same malleable properties as gold.

Alfredo went on, “Not until the second year had passed did I graduate from that menial apprentice work to real gold. Without saying much, my grandfather came to me one afternoon and plopped a small metal bin before me that was full of casting shot, which is granulated gold. I looked at him, and he managed a small smile before returning to his office. I turned my attention back to the gold and stared at it for a few seconds. Then I scooped my hand into the bin and ran it through the gold, letting it pour through my small fingers like sand. I felt an electrical sensation up and down my spine, and at 10 years old, I was hooked. The previous years of rolling pennies and missing all those kick-the-can games vanished in a red-hot surge of gold fever. I was the luckiest boy in all of Chicago! Without even knowing it, I had found my lifelong calling, a calling that would eventually lead me to every exotic corner of the planet.” Now, some 40 years later, Alfredo is blessed with the opportunity to share his passion in bringing jewelry enthusiasts together with the finest and rarest gems in the world. As he states, “It is a distinct pleasure and honor to serve some of the most wonderful and fascinating individuals around the globe.”

When Alfredo reflects on why he is so philanthropic and, as he puts it, “he can’t say no to requests.” He believes it is because of what happened to his family when they first arrived in Chicago and were living at the Wilson Hotel. Times were tough for the Molina family; Alfredo noted that the family’s major source of protein at that time was garbanzo beans. It was an everyday staple being served at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. One day in the lobby of this hotel where they were staying, his father bumped into someone he had casually known in Cuba. This man, seeing the family had nothing, took them to a grocery store, purchasing groceries for them and, Alfredo suspects, the clothing they needed. Alfredo said that moment in time left an indelible imprint on him, forever changing the course of his life. It was the kindness of this stranger that caused Alfredo to know he was going to help others.

Alfredo has a deep desire to give. He feels blessed and lucky. He prays daily and gives thanks but never prays for material things. Instead, Alfredo prays for enlightenment and guidance. He noted that Lazarus is his patron saint and that when he is home he lights a candle to honor him. Alfredo tries to live a life of gratitude and is even thankful for the challenges he faces daily.

He believes the key to success is resilience, the ability to constantly be tested and weathered by the storm. This is when real growth occurs. Alfredo also attributes his success to having great mentors. He stated that one of the greatest things you can do is be a mentor. He also believes that if you concentrate on the negative there is no way to do positive things. Alfredo thinks, much like his friend Peter Thomas, that when negative things happen you need to try to compartmentalize them by placing them in a figurative or symbolic box. Then, if possible, hire someone else to deal with the box.

The three life philosophies that guide Alfredo's life and philanthropy are as follows:

- Everything happens for a good reason.
- Nothing has any meaning except the meaning you give it.
- On the other side of tremendous frustration is tremendous success.

Alfredo believes that he and his life are in a constant state of transformation and that his philanthropic activities help him reach the next level. Life, to him, is about constantly stretching. At the end of his life, Alfredo would rather look back and realize he was part of the "I Shouldn't Have Club" instead of being part of the "I Should Have Club."

One of Alfredo's favorite books, which he usually gives to everyone he meets, is *Rhinoceros Success* by Scott Alexander. It is a book about how to be successful, and as Alfredo describes it, there are about seven things the book teaches that each person should do:

- Develop and have a thick skin.
- Focus on what you want.
- Charge ahead; in other words, go for it.
- Do not stand still.
- Make things happen.
- Remember, you will be constantly tested.
- You will also be challenged and allowed to expand.

He also believes that many individuals live in a FEAR mode, meaning false evidence appearing real. By living as a rhinoceros and without fear, Alfredo believes he and many, if not all, other entrepreneurs are afraid of nothing.

Alfredo and his wife, Lisa, give away about \$3 million annually. When I asked him how they decide on the projects, charities, nonprofit organizations, and programs that they will fund annually, Alfredo's first response was, "How do you say 'no'?" But he did concede that there are criteria they follow, that the foundation and their personal giving over the years have become more strategic. The four areas on which they focus are children, education, diseases, and the arts. Alfredo shared that some of their projects and activities include endowing chairs at universities and colleges, whereas others are supporting a few families directly, meaning, for example, that they assist a single mom who might have an illness and needs a helping hand. Alfredo and Lisa also have a charitable board that reviews and monitors their donations. The members of this board do site visits to the nonprofit organizations and charities that are funded.

I asked Alfredo if they ever stop funding a nonprofit organization or individual, to which his response was, "When do you cut someone off?" He said it is hard to stop providing the funds to nonprofit organizations that are doing great work. Alfredo also shared that he personally never passes someone asking for money, such as a homeless person, without giving them something financially, by which he means \$20, \$50, or sometimes even \$100. He went further, saying he does not care where the recipients spend the money, meaning on a meal or alcohol, nor does he worry about whether they are telling the truth. He simply knows he is supposed to give back and that by doing so he feels great. Alfredo told me about a study showing that when you perform an act of random kindness, serotonin and dopamine are released in your brain and allow you to feel a natural high. It is a good feeling!

Alfredo and Lisa lead by example, chairing many galas and other events annually and reaching out to others to let them know what wonderful opportunities exist for getting involved and possibly transforming someone's life. They also require their 50 employees in Arizona to be involved with at least two nonprofit organizations.

When I asked Alfredo if being charitable has helped his business, his immediate response was "Yes, absolutely! My giving has given back to me in multiples of thousands." Alfredo is also tremendously humbled by the affect his and Lisa's charitable giving has had on individuals. He sheepishly shared that every day someone says thank you. For Alfredo, that is greatly appreciated.

He encourages others to live a life of significance, not simply a life of existence. A life of significance will allow you, according to Alfredo, to be charitable to others in numerous ways.

Alfredo's Advice

- Find something you are passionate about and get involved; find your life's purpose in being able to give.
- Get personally involved by giving not only your financial resources but also your time.
- Give of your heart; your heart needs to be fed and giving is a spiritual happening.
- Giving is a privilege, and by giving you will receive more than you could possibly give.
- You will meet amazing individuals through charitable efforts.
- Through your charitable efforts you will discover what is important in your life and true happiness will be yours.



STEPHAN PYLES

Stephan Pyles, a fifth-generation Texan and a pioneer of new American cuisine, has created 14 restaurants over the past 22 years. The founding father of southwestern cuisine, he was the first person in the Southwest to win a James Beard Award for Best Chef and was the first Texan inducted into Who's Who of Food and Wine in America. *Bon Appétit* has credited him with "almost single-handedly changing the cooking scene in Texas," while *The New York Times* called Stephan "an absolute genius in the kitchen." In 2006, *Esquire* named Stephan "Chef of the Year" and included his newest restaurant, Stephan Pyles, in its list of best new restaurants.

Texas Monthly named Stephan one of the "twenty most impressive, intriguing, and influential Texans for 1998," and in its February 2007 issue named his restaurant Stephan Pyles "Best New Restaurant of 2006." In late spring, he will open a new restaurant in the Arts District named Samar that will serve "international small plates" inspired by the cuisine of India, Spain, and the eastern Mediterranean. Stephan is cuisine consultant to American Airlines and the Dallas Museum of Art.

Stephan got his start at the Great Chefs of France Cooking School at the Mondavi Winery, where he served as chef's assistant and worked with Michelin three-star chefs such as Michel Guerard, Jean and Pierre Troigros,