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## Natural Stones owner prepares to end one chapter in his life, begin another

★ Follow Mike Easterling

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Garrick Beck, the owner of the Natural Stones gem and mineral store, measures a piece of Australian chrysoprase at his shop on Monday. After over 30 years of operation, the store will shut down at 5 p.m. Today, at 75, Beck is retiring from the gem and mineral business, and closing Natural Stones to pursue a handful of other opportunities “while I’ve still got my wits about me — and my strength,” he said.

photos by Gabriela Campos/The New Mexican

Over his 30-plus years of owning his own shop, Garrick Beck has seen a number of changes in the gem and mineral business — none bigger than the demand for quality and authenticity his customers now display.

“In the ‘90s, people loved turquoise and didn’t care where it came from,” Beck said. “Now, they want to know if it came from the Southwest. They want to know what mine it came from and the story of that mine. There have been other changes like that. They know stones.”

Beck said he has welcomed that shift toward a more discerning, sophisticated clientele and believes his focus on quality is perhaps the biggest reason why his shop Natural Stones has thrived for more than three decades. But when he locks the front door of his business at 5 p.m. Tuesday after concluding his workday, he’ll be doing so for the last time.

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At 75, Beck is retiring from the gem and mineral business and closing Natural Stones to pursue a handful of other opportunities “while I’ve still got my wits about me — and my strength,” he said.

His decision to move on to different pursuits is not due to frustration or disillusionment with the industry. On the contrary, Beck lauded the industry, which he said remains dominated by independently owned operations, avoiding the kind of corporatization that other segments of the retail and wholesale markets have faced.

“This business is very nonsexist, very nonracist, very international,” he said. “It’s dominated by family businesses, not six giant businesses. That’s always made it very attractive to me.”

A native New Yorker, Beck said when he opened Natural Stones at 930 W. Baca St. in 1994, the shop was one of only a few such jewelry-oriented enterprises that weren’t located on the Plaza.

That has changed significantly over the past 30 years, he said, expressing his satisfaction at having been a sort of retail pioneer in the midtown area.

“Baca Street has become a real nexus of art and culture,” Beck said. “I’m proud to be part of the Baca Street community’s growth.”

Nevertheless, he said the time has come to begin a new chapter in his life.

He’ll celebrate his retirement by serving refreshments Tuesday and inviting longtime customers and friends to stop by the store and say goodbye.

“We’re just going to have a very quiet time here,” he said. “We’ll be serving sparkling beverages and ginger snaps, which is what I served on the day we opened.”

It didn’t take Beck long to come to understand he had made the right choice in opening his new venture.

He recalled how a woman from the East Coast came in one day not long after he had opened the store, looking for help replacing a broken stone in a silver bracelet.

She had inherited the three-stone piece from her grandfather, who had been given the bracelet in the 1920s in gratitude for his work on a water project for one of the Northern New Mexico pueblos. The bracelet served as the woman’s prized remembrance of her grandfather, Beck said.

The mottled-green, white, pale-blue and brown turquoise in the piece was unusual, Beck said, leading him to recognize it as the product of the nearby Cerrillos mine.

Beck located a rough piece in his inventory that matched the two on either side of it, then cut it down to fit perfectly in the empty space. “I don’t know if anyone else could have done that for her,” Beck wrote in an email.

“And I knew right then that I had come to the right place and was doing fulfilling work.”

Beck plans to be busy in his retirement, beginning with helping to mount an off-Broadway production as a board member for The Living Theatre, a New York-based theater company that has been around for more than 75 years.

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The Living Theatre is attempting to bring *Rosetta*, a production about a Korean War nurse, to New York in 2026 after the play was presented in 2023 in Gwangju, South Korea.

He also will devote himself to an organic forestry project through his longtime association with the Northwest National Resource Group, a nonprofit organization designed to strengthen the ecological and economic vitality of Northwest forests, according to its website.

Beck said he is working on a project demonstrating how clear-cut forests can be nurtured, having their health, productivity and biodiversity restored.

Beck also has been part of a children’s gardening program since the 1980s, one that has helped convert vacant New York City lots into community gardens with the assistance of public schools and the Trust for Public Land. Beck said he will be part of a similar project in Santa Fe.

Finally, Beck will be writing a sequel to his memoir *True Stories, Tales from the Generation of a New World Culture*, a book that chronicles his experiences as a child actor in off-Broadway shows and his work in helping launch the Rainbow Gathering, the counterculture events held annually since the early 1970s on public lands.

But Beck’s influence in the gem and mineral business will continue to be felt locally. His store manager of the last two decades, Shannon Schreiber, will manage a newly renovated shop in the Natural Stones space come spring, while Zoe Van Gunten, the Natural Stones sales manager, will work at Earthfire Gems at 121 Galisteo St.

Schreiber and Van Gunten have played an important role in helping Natural Stones customers make well-informed choices over the years, Beck said.

“We tell [customers] as much as they’re willing to listen to,” he said. “We teach them about structure, where it came from, the hardness, the brilliance and how it is used. I think the public enjoys that, and it’s one of the reasons we’ve been a success here.”