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Community Briefs

Pawn Shop for Royalty

Erté art deco statues. Lique crystal. Original Chagalls, Picassos, Rauschenbergs. Not the items normally associated with a pawn shop.

But at Beverly Loan Company, you won't find any used tennis rackets and acoustic guitars with broken strings. That's because this



Helaine Zimmelman, left, and her sister, Jean, right, oversee Beverly Loan Company.

pawn shop is located in Beverly Hills, where it is the city's oldest and most exclusive "collateral lender," as its owners like to refer to it.

Overseen by sisters Jean and Helaine Zimmelman, Beverly Loan Company is rare in another respect — a pawn shop owned and operated by women. Founded in 1938 by Louie Zimmelman, Beverly Loan Company grew into a thriving business that made loans on jewelry and fine art. Well-acquainted with the establishment since childhood, the Zimmelman sisters started working for their father more than a decade ago. Following Louie's death, Jean and Helaine took over and expanded the business — now located in the Bank of America building on the corner of Little Santa Monica and Beverly Drive — in 1994. Helaine's daughter, Stephanie, recently joined the staff, further advancing the institution's family ties.

The sisters see their feminine sensibilities and family tradition as distinct advantages in a business where discretion, decorum and trust are essential. Jean and Helaine run an airtight, confidential operation, and while they can't reveal the identities of their clientele, they have seen all manner of life forms connected to Hollywood celebrity and international royalty walk through their high-security doors, many of them in desperate situations. They also have heard every possible excuse from clients shedding their family heirlooms and valuables for some quick cash — medical bills, face lifts, attorney fees, and on and on.

"A lot of people are trying to finish something — a movie, an invention," says Jean. "They turn to us because they feel really secure knowing that there's a bank right downstairs." — Michael Aushenker, *Community Editor*