

Quality Is Key

After Nearly 40 Years of Making Dolls and Memories, Ashton-Drake Remains Committed to Excellence

By Stephanie Finnegan



Above: A gift to forever cherish, Ashton-Drake's first annual holiday baby doll, My First Christmas Gianna, is available in a limited edition of 2,999 worldwide.

One of the most respected companies in the doll world is undeniably Ashton-Drake. The doll firm is a household name, and nearly every collector and aficionado has either bought a doll for themselves, gifted one to another, or

received a creation that was produced under the enduring brand. Ashton-Drake is a revered business because it has its finger on both the pulse of what collectors emotionally yearn for and also what artists want to sculpt and share with the public.

What's the Buzz Behind Ashton-Drake's Dolls?

DOLLS: *Why do you think collectors are drawn to the lifelike/reborn style of dolls?*

Gwynne Gorr: We believe new life is a miraculous thing. Lifelike baby dolls help to capture that miracle and remind collectors of the majesty of those moments every time they look at them — and also how fast those moments pass. A baby doll is in many ways the embodiment of family love and those joyful moments. At the various stages of life collectors pass through, the various elements of this experience may change; but at its core, the magic of a lifelike baby is an experience that is hard to resist.

We spend a great deal of time studying real baby photos and videos to be able to re-create the highest possible level of realism in the final doll product. Interesting expressions and body positivity are very important as they make our baby dolls come to life.

DOLLS: *Why do you think collectors are attracted to your glamorous, grown-up dolls?*

Gorr: Dolls at any age are an opportunity for the collector to experience visually things that are most important to them — things that touch their hearts. Adult fashion dolls are beloved for many reasons. Certainly, they can bring to life magical experiences that the customer has either had and wants to remember; or ones they haven't had the opportunity to enjoy, but have a deep interest in keeping close to them. They also can represent qualities of the person collecting the doll. Finally, as an art form, many adult dolls are simply beautiful and people collect them because they like to surround themselves with things of beauty.

DOLLS: *Does Ashton-Drake suggest to the artists what they want to see created? Or do the artists come with a theme and a doll already in mind?*

Gorr: At Ashton-Drake, we work both ways. We are constantly listening to our customers to better understand the types of products they would like to see us develop. However, we are also very respectful to the creative magic our artists bring to their products, and if a strong project is shared with us, we can go that direction as well.

DOLLS: *How does Ashton-Drake see itself in 2024?*

Gorr: Ashton-Drake has grown and has changed based on the desires of its customers and the tremendous creativity cultivated by its development team. We are going into many new directions with our new product development, and there is much to be excited about in the months ahead as new launches in expanding categories start to unfold.

Left: A tribute to Britain's beloved queen, Queen Elizabeth II's 1952 coronation is commemorated with this exquisite, regal, lifelike doll.

Below: Commemorating the crowning of Britain's beloved royal, the elegance of Princess Catherine is captured in Ashton-Drake's breathtaking portrait doll.



Gwynne Gorr, senior director of Ashton-Drake Dolls, is the perfect person to helm this ever-evolving field. A passionate collector herself, and having forged a multidecade career in the doll world, Gorr is an individual who not only understands the mechanics of how a doll is manufactured and made but also comprehends *why* a doll is made and just how meaningful that doll is to its purchaser and owner. Gorr is able to bring both her years of business experience and her years of empathy and sincerity to a brand that is still building momentum after almost 40 years.

When asked about the secret of its continued success, Gorr was quite insightful: "I think it starts with the fact that everyone on the Ashton-Drake team really loves dolls. We have been in the business a long time and know as collectors what makes a doll special. Many hours, every week, are spent on reviewing materials, construction, and techniques to make sure that not only is this a beautiful doll, but that it is also made in such a way that it can stand the test of time and be enjoyed across generations."

In 2025, Ashton-Drake will be celebrating its 40th anniversary. In a world filled with startups and pop-ups, this milestone is an achievement worth applauding. As many companies are bidding farewell or are scrambling to find their relevance, Ashton-Drake continues to stand tall and confident. Gorr said, "I believe we have experienced longevity in the doll category for a couple of key reasons. First, we deeply care what our customers think. We are proud to offer a customer service group that regularly shares with us the feedback that people give us when they call in for any reason. We love connecting with collectors at shows and events and learn what they are interested in, and what they think about what we are offering."



Above: Ashton-Drake is a go-to doll company for enshrining special moments in life. Emma Grace's first words honor a heartwarming milestone. She says "Mama!"

Below: Look at precious Emily as she sleeps so deeply! The Emily doll took America by storm 20 years ago, and now Ashton-Drake is celebrating with this reintroduction. The groundbreaking baby was created by artist Linda Webb.



One of the most essential components of an Ashton-Drake creation is the doll's quality. To become a part of the Ashton-Drake family, a doll must receive the coveted stamp of approval, which means it is beyond just pretty and cute. It is also designed to become an enduring legacy acquisition. "We are not in the low-ticket doll business for a reason," Gorr said. "We offer products that will stand the test of time. Our goal is that someone who receives an Ashton-Drake doll will have that doll for decades to come."

The Ashton-Drake team is relentless in figuring out what style of doll will become a collector's next sweetheart and what doll will become a collectible sensation. "We monitor the competitive landscape — not just for dolls, but for popular culture as well. We are entrepreneurial. We figure out what can we do to elevate every idea we have to create something amazing for our customers," Gorr said.

One of the reasons why Ashton-Drake has such a loyal fan base and remains a recognizable collectible name is the quality stable of artists who design for the brand. Their doll artists are a veritable Who's Who in the doll realm. Gorr said, "We are very fortunate to have many artists that have brought us absolutely beautiful dolls to share with our collectors over the years. Of course, Ping Lau is very

popular with our collectors because of how well she captures life and its many emotions in her sculptures. Linda Murray is another of our beloved artists and her work has stood the test of time across a broad expanse of our history. Violet Parker and Sherry Rawn are also favorites. Yolanda Bello is the artist that kind of started it all for us, and we are thrilled to count her among our treasured creatives."

Even though Ashton-Drake is associated with this array of famous luminaries, the company is scanning the horizons for future, undiscovered talent, too.

"We are always on the hunt for new and fresh faces in this business, and now that shows are starting to open back up again, we look forward to what the next generation of doll artists will bring to life," Gorr said. "Ashton-Drake has been a proud member of the doll community for nearly 40 years. As doll lovers, we are passionate about every doll we create. Capturing picture-perfect moments that bring a smile to your face and a hug to your heart is a goal we do not take lightly. We feel we are a trusted team with the responsibility to ensure that the magic of doll collecting is an experience that will be enjoyed and shared with others long into the future." 🌟

Visit [AshtonDrake.com](https://www.AshtonDrake.com) to check out new releases as they make their debut.



It is all about longevity and legacy, isn't it? Ashton-Drake unveils this lifelike baby doll that has a lasting expression of love: Grandma's Precious Gift Doll and Personalized Keepsake Box.