



Fine Jewelry Continues to Evolve

Never before has the international jewelry industry seen such a varied offer. In 2019, revenue was \$21 billion, with China largely behind this financial success with many jewelers exporting their products to this market. Behind these impressive figures, which support hundreds of thousands of jobs, there is also a less glorious reality—the overall jewelry industry seems unwilling to take creative risks. Today, its goal seems to focus on the production of easily salable pieces that correspond to customers’ state of mind when these jewels come to market through luxurious events.

But change is in the air.

By Marie Chabrol

During the unprecedented health crisis shaking our world, brands must reinvent themselves. In light of the current offer of jewelry on the market, are customers beginning to look elsewhere for different types of jewels that are more in line with their own values? The answer seems to be yes. The key to success apparently is the ability to be ingenious, creative and different. The industry can make less but better.

Far from Big Boring Diamonds

For a long time, jewelry was associated largely with diamonds along with a few colored gemstones. Many buyers were guided more by investment than by the simple pleasure of having a piece to cherish for what it represented. While this observation may still be valid—look at auction results—it is nevertheless important to take a second look at this assertion.

Today, high-end jewelry no longer necessarily involves the use of classic materials. It is now possible to make daring and amazing pieces that can be considered fine jewelry such as those created by Mélanie Georgacopoulos. This Hamburg-based Greek designer uses mother-of-pearl and



Top: Pearl and gold necklace designed by Melanie Georgacopoulos for Tasaki.

Above: Mother-of-pearl double tile bracelet in gold with a South Sea pearl by Melanie Georgacopoulos.

pearls in unconventional ways. “Pearls are absolutely mesmerizing. Needing no sanding, polishing, faceting, they are ready to use in jewelry, as soon as they come out of the oyster, unlike gemstones. Also, it helps that they come in so many colors, varieties and sizes which makes them extremely versatile to work with,” she says. The designer also highlights mother-of-pearl in complex inlays, thus paying a colorful tribute to gemstones.

Rings, brooches and bracelets speak to our imagination and make us reflect on the very essence of what a jewel can be. For the high-end Japanese jewelry house Tasaki, for whom she regularly signs collections, Georgacopoulos turns the pearl—which is rooted in Japanese history—into unexpected forms. “My main direction for the last ten years has been to rethink pearl jewelry and, most recently, I have been looking at mother-of-pearl as a core material around which I build collections. It is important for me to bring ideas and concepts to the jewelry table that I haven’t seen before, therefore I wipe the slate clean for each collection and start over from scratch. I like to think that I am writing a new chapter in a book dedicated to these materials, where each chapter brings a surprise to the reader,” she says. Daring and surprising and oh so exciting!

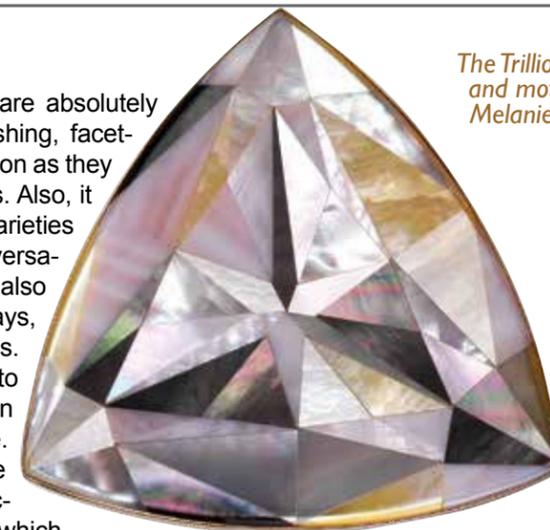
Unusual Materials and Rare Know-How

Creativity in jewelry also exceeds technical boundaries. While gold and platinum are traditionally used, several designers are looking elsewhere. Australia-based Lingjun Sun recently introduced a collection incorporating a combination of Corian and anodized aluminum with surprising results. He also uses Australian opals that he has cut himself in Australia over a ten year period.

The London-based Swiss designer, Cora Sheibani, is inspired by the play of colors and contrasts for gems that she has faceted and assembled by the best cutters. Drawing on ancient jewelry and forgotten techniques, her results are cheerful and colorful, restoring the letters of nobility to stones that have been abandoned by the current industry.



Mixing materials in this Corian, aluminum and opal ring by Lingjun Sun.



The Trillion brooch in gold and mother-of-pearl by Melanie Georgacopoulos.



Almond drop long earrings with dumortierite and red jasper by Cora Sheibani.

Two fine examples are a superb necklace combining malachite, nephrite and smoky quartz and a pair of earrings that perfectly matches red jasper and dumortierite.

Fine jewelry can also be very creative while keeping its codes (i.e. complex pieces, lots of stones, rare and sought-after gems). To create something different, designers can look to the colors of the metal, while incorporating coatings that can change colors to blue, green, pink, purple, yellow, etc. They can also integrate new structures, which are often inspired by the most modern of buildings. “Architecture is a solid source of my inspiration,” says Hong Kong-based Austi Lee. “It also has to do with my product design background, which gives me a unique perspective when designing jewelry. I enjoy creating something new and unseen before, as well as mixing and matching different materials. I like to apply many different architectural features into my designs.”

Many jewelers have integrated this point of view into contemporary jewelry, giving the pieces more sparkle. Like it or not, that is OK. The more character the jewelry has, the more interesting it is. Today, it’s necessary to innovate while understanding what some customers want.



Haylin earrings in diamonds and purple rhodium by Neha Dani.



Emerald, lapis-lazuli and pink diamond bangle by Austi Lee.

Classic Stones, But...

Who says classic stones should mean standard sizes? How can Nature produce so many wonderful things, but then humans need to standardize them all? Fortunately, there are jewelers who understand that they can have a different look and a different approach. In Brazil, Gaby Simão uses stones in their most natural states possible, while sometimes cutting them to emphasize what makes them intriguing. "Colored gemstones are my true passion," says the designer. "I find beautiful stones and have them cut to show their best reflection." As one example, Simão placed a rutile-rich kunzite in the center of a ring that is as magnificent as improbable.

For New York-based Alexandra Mor, it is important to use materials that are classic and sustainable. "We have been practicing transparency, provenance, the preservation of craft, and limited production since we launched the brand. For most high jewelry designers and collectors, the two terms—sustainability and fine jewelry—have not always been accepted together." While the designer only uses materials with traceable origins, she also combines stones that are not used in classic high-end jewelry, as well as rough stones, for amazing results. One example is a magnificent



Ring with 7.56-ctw opal, 16.86-ctw emeralds, and 1.49-ctw diamonds by Austi Lee.



Eternity band featuring 15 Muzo emeralds with diamond accents in platinum set on an 18K yellow gold Alexandra Mor logo gallery by Alexandra Mor.



The Abraço ring made with gold, diamonds and kunzite by Gaby Simao.

ring associating topaz and tagua seeds, a sort of vegetable ivory. Another is a gold and diamond ring set with rough emeralds from the Muzo mine in Colombia.

Atypical Patterns and Subjects

The goal of Judicael Vales is to explore other territories and design jewels that break with traditional codes. A professional tattoo artist, this California-based French jeweler decided to move into jewelry in 2007. His *Sacred Skulls* are as fascinating as they are astonishing. The elongated skulls discovered in Egypt and Peru guide his creative and complex design process. "Skulls shock people by their very nature, since they represent the vessel of the soul and make us question life and death," he comments. The majority of his pieces are unique, each skull corresponding to an

exchange with the customer who orders it. Creations require several days or weeks. "I do a rough sketch, then gather the appropriate materials, such as exotic woods, precious metals and gemstones. I sit in front of my workbench and let the magic happen." One of his latest creations is a skull inlaid with a rare euclase. An unforgettable piece.

And there are the jewels by Harumi Klossowska de Rola, daughter of the painter Balthus. Her spooky bestiary is as magical as the unique pieces she offers in her studio. They incorporate skulls covered with coral or turquoise and sculpted eagle heads adorned with sparkling diamonds.

Humor Is Key

Because humor is often ideal for dramatizing things, you would expect more creators to use it. But it is not easy, and few designers know how to use humor or whimsy well. Among the exceptions is Cora Sheibani, who is inspired by her Swiss culture to make rings evoking country-style pastries that are unobtainable in England. "My *Copper Mold* collection—featuring cakes, jellies, pies and other pastries—was conceived while I was in Switzerland at the workshop of one of my goldsmiths. While the goldsmith was working,



Thotme skull pendant in Bolivian rosewood, gold, diamonds, enclase and fire agate by Judicael Vales.



Buteo Platypterus gold ring in petrified wood, diamonds, and aventurine by Harumi Klossowska de Rola.



Campbell Soup enamel and diamond earrings in gold by Suzanne Syz.



Copper Mold and pastry rings by Cora Sheibani.



Lifesaver sapphire and gold earrings by Suzanne Syz.

all I could think about was having a coffee break with some regional Swiss pastries that I could not find in London. So, I started to draw one of these delicacies," she smiles. Transformed to jewelry, you will never look at a Linzer Torte the same way again.

On a different note, another Swiss designer has made humor her trademark. Suzanne Syz and her husband collect contemporary art and she knows perfectly well that this area is often difficult to master. Her jewels are as beautiful as they are unlikely. "I could not find any pieces that really spoke to me," says Syz. "I'm a joyful person and wanted whimsy in my jewelry. I initially designed some examples for myself and then a few friends asked me where I found them. Once they discovered they were my own designs, orders started to come and I began a new adventure in my life combining my passions for jewelry and art."

Jewelry is not necessarily the classic discipline that we imagine. Consumers will discover more discreet talents, far from the big names that often make the news. At the heart of this large universe are sparks of freshness, creativity and diversity showing that fine jewelry continues to evolve.

Photos are courtesy of each designer/brand featured. ■



Ebony ring with gold, tagua seed and 10.55-ct topaz by Alexandra Mor.



Malachite, nephrite and smoky quartz necklace by Cora Sheibani.