

FINANCIAL TIMES

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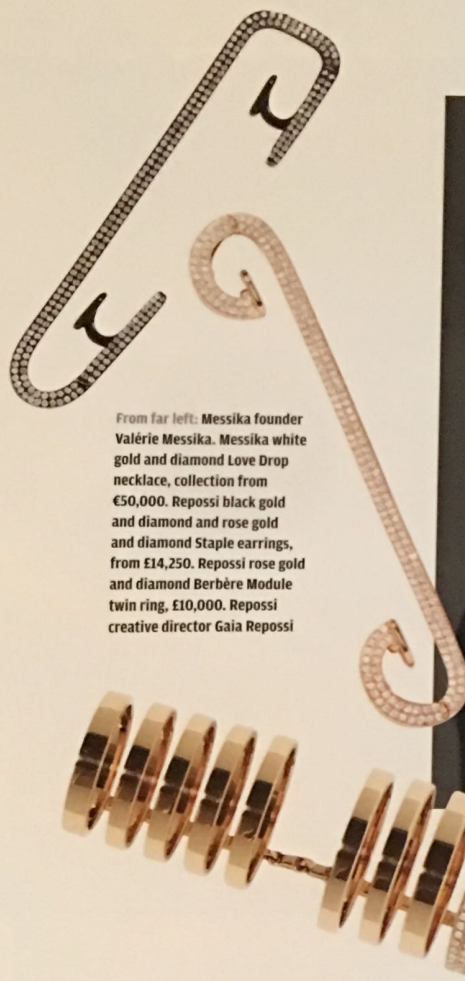
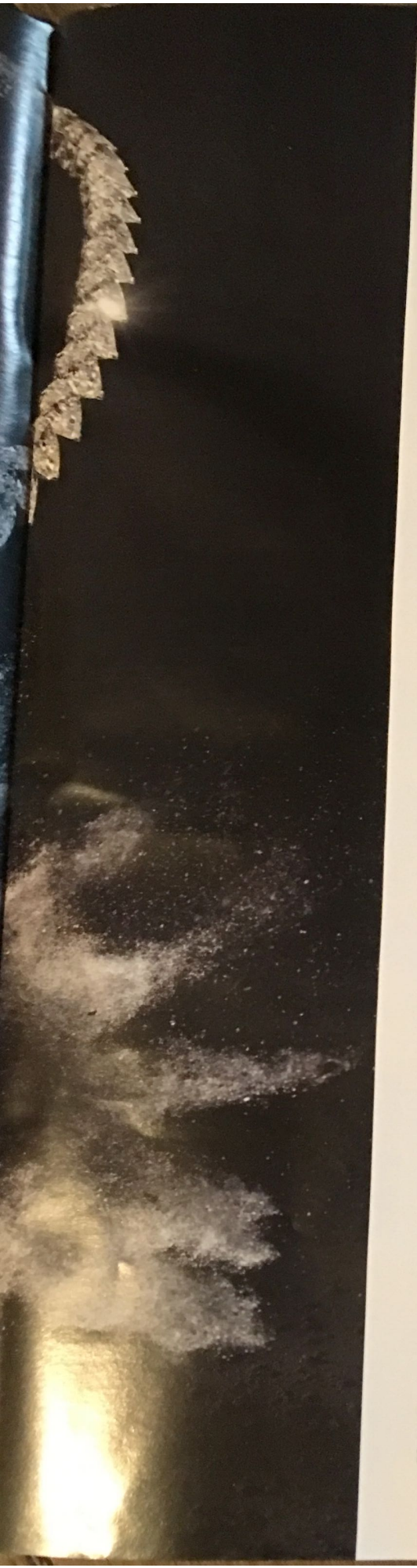
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bright young things

A vibrant new generation of jewellery designers is forging a spirit of relaxed opulence. Vivienne Becker reports





From far left: Messika founder Valérie Messika. Messika white gold and diamond Love Drop necklace, collection from €50,000. Repossi black gold and diamond and rose gold and diamond Staple earrings, from £14,250. Repossi rose gold and diamond Berbère Module twin ring, £10,000. Repossi creative director Gaia Repossi



The world of jewels and gems, despite being millennia old, is steadfastly resistant to change. There are valid reasons: the gem hunting, the investment element, the heirloom factor, unshakably strong traditions, not to mention the fact that a high-jewellery collection might be years in the sourcing, planning and execution. Market agility is not easy.

Yet today jewellers find themselves at a pivotal moment, facing changes fuelled principally by the need to appeal to a new and very different generation of clients, or potential clients. These include the much-talked-about millennials: young, entrepreneurial types who are short on concentration (apparently), big on ideas and individuality, and have a fresh set of values. Deeply conventional diamond specialists – coming from a sector that, after a recent 25 per cent drop in prices, is only now stabilising – are reassessing and asking themselves how they can stimulate the market and connect with this new generation and their ethical, dress-down, anti-bling attitudes. In other words, how to make diamond jewellery relevant.

Jean-Marc Lieberherr, former managing director of the diamonds business at metals and mining company Rio Tinto, is masterminding a new initiative for the Diamond Producers Association, of which he is now CEO and whose members produce 75 per cent of the world's diamonds. The new marketing

campaign is aimed, he says, at “creating new emotional territory for the younger generation by understanding what role diamonds can play in their world”. It is, he explains, a question of messaging. “The established messages are too associated with rituals and conventions that have lost some level of relevance. This generation wants to celebrate the opportunities ahead, rather than past milestones. They’re searching for real connections in a virtual world.”

The campaign is welcome news to many, but the established diamond specialists are late to the party. The gap between the high jewellery of master jewellers and recognisable brand icons (such as Bulgari's B.zero1, Cartier's Love bracelet and Van Cleef & Arpels' Alhambra) left space for a new style that was able to connect creatively and commercially with fashion, lifestyle, art and design.

In Milan, as early as 1967, a time of social and cultural revolution, Pomellato pioneered the genre of fine-fashion jewellery, infusing it with the city's design flair (a concept it is now reclaiming and reinvigorating, says Pomellato Group's new CEO Sabina Belli, to capitalise on current changes in attitude). In the late 1980s, Stephen Webster took a rock 'n' roll approach to jewellery, while a decade on, designer-jeweller Shaun Leane sparked a new mood with his blend of traditional Hatton Garden training and fashion influences – best seen in his collaborations with Alexander McQueen. But it was a new breed of young, fashionable, mainly female designers who really stepped into this vacuum about 10 years ago, creating the jewels they wanted to wear: precious,



Clockwise from left: Margaret's Frosted in Time jewellery display in Gstaad earlier this year. Margaret rose gold and diamond egg locket pendant, £13,500. The brand's co-founders Candice Ophir (standing) and Oriana Melamed-Sabrier

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often diamond-dusted, but daringly unconventional and modern – high fashion with a street-style edge.

This whole new alternative category of fine-fashion jewels began to change the hierarchy and landscape of the jewellery world. While there have always been game-changing individual designers, such as Verdura and Schlumberger in the 1940s and 1950s, Andrew Grima in the 1960s and 1970s, and the unassailable JAR from the 1980s onwards, all were, or are, highly exclusive, while this wave of designers, operating at a much more affordable level, has democratised precious jewellery to an unprecedented degree.

Gaia Repossi (pictured on previous pages), fourth generation of the Italian jeweller, was aged just 21 when she became the firm's creative director in 2007, and three years later launched her Berbere knuckle ring (example pictured on previous pages, £10,000), a minimal mix of tribal and architectural influences. This March, Repossi launched her latest collection, Staple (diamond earrings pictured on previous pages, from £14,250), its industrial chic inspired by staples and stitches, at the Gagosian Gallery in Le Bourget, the earrings set out in showcases designed by architect Rem Koolhaas. Meanwhile, Repossi has a dedicated space in the new Dover Street Market on London's Haymarket. Last year, LVMH announced it was taking a minority stake in the brand, a sure sign that the luxury leader believes in the future of this iconoclastic sector and the way it directly reaches out to the millennial consumer.

Modern, dynamic diamond jewellery houses disrupting the status quo include the Paris-based

Messika and Nirav Modi, which has its headquarters located in Mumbai but is opening five boutiques around the world this year, including a Bond Street flagship. Both brands directly source their diamonds, but while Messika exudes a young, vibrant fashion flavour, Nirav Modi occupies territory closer to high jewellery.

Valérie Messika (pictured on previous pages) is the embodiment of modern jewelled glamour and one of the most influential forces for change. The daughter of renowned diamantaire André Messika, with whom she trained, she launched her own brand in 2005 with a clear vision: contemporary design. In just a decade she's built an international modern "maison". Frustrated, she recalls, by the traditional diamond business, she saw a glaring gap in the market between grand Place Vendôme heritage and high-street jewellery. She saw too that the global fine-jewellery market, estimated (by McKinsey & Company) at \$263bn, was still 80 per cent unbranded. This prompted her to create delicate diamond jewels with a rock 'n' roll edge, in tune with women's fashions and lifestyles. One of her original Move designs (from £640), centred on an open oval panel in which three diamonds move playfully along a hidden rail like an abacus, is now sold somewhere in the world every 30 minutes. Last year she launched a high-jewellery collection (from €50,000; Love Drop necklace pictured on previous pages), which now comprises 25 per cent of turnover. Messika says, "My customer is very sensitive to fashion, and more concerned with



expressing personal style than showing wealth through the size or value of a diamond."

"Jewellery is no longer about ostentation or oneupmanship, but about sharing an appreciation of beauty," agrees Nirav Modi (pictured overleaf). During a dinner and concert he hosted this March in the grounds of the maharajah's palace in Jodhpur, a spectacular fashion show featured models wearing diamonds and clothes woven from fresh flowers – embodying the fleeting and the forever, Modi explains. It was all about the experience, another important tenet of millennial



The toy-inspired stretchy gold and diamond Embrace bangle exudes the easy, casual opulence of today's new mood



attitude. Raised in Antwerp in a family of diamantaires, Modi launched his own brand five years ago, after a friend asked him to make a pair of earrings. He too saw a gap and an opportunity, particularly in translating his Indian jewellery heritage into a contemporary western idiom, by combining Indian craftsmanship with the latest technology to bring new forms and volumes, plus lightness, movement and wearability, to the jewels – and imbuing high jewellery with a youthful spirit. The idea for his brilliantly engineered Embrace bangle (Grand Embrace pictured bottom right, from £43,700), a stretchy gold and diamond-encrusted curved bracelet, came to him when he saw his daughters pulling their elasticated toy bangles on and off. Worn singly or stacked, in different colours of gold and diamonds, Embrace exudes the easy, casual opulence of today's new mood.

Geneva-based private jeweller Margaret delivers a new-generation experience in very different style. Business partners Candice Ophir, who has a publishing and marketing background, and Oriana Melamed-Sabrier (both pictured on previous page) – a gem expert who worked at Cartier with Micheline Kanoui, at Christie's, and at New York diamantaire William Goldberg – grew up together like sisters, and it's this real, very personal connection and the concept of a family jewel box of meaningful, emotive pieces with stories and soul that drive their business. Their designs – each individual, most of them personalised – have an antique charm that spills into contemporary cool: a rose-gold egg locket pendant (example pictured on previous page, £13,500) is monogrammed with diamonds, smooth, tactile and pebble-like, while rings shaped as tiaras have Edwardian-style diamond stars, old-cut diamonds and darkened gold. They exude a discreet elegance, suitable for all-



Clockwise from top left: Moussaieff diamond, ruby and emerald pendant necklace, price on request. Boucheron gold, diamond and citrine Cape de Lumière, collection from £25,000. Nirav Modi rose, yellow and white gold and diamond Grand Embrace bangles, from £43,700. The eponymous founder of Nirav Modi



day, everyday wear. Ophir and Melamed-Sabrier believe clients don't necessarily want a brand name, but look instead for emotional value, craftsmanship and a personal vision behind each jewel. In Gstaad earlier this year, at the height of the ski season, they staged a stunning pink winter forest mise-en-scène (pictured on previous page), with the jewels draped on frosted twigs or nestling in velvety snow-like folds for all to touch and discover: an intimate, immersive experience that symbolises the new jewellery landscape.

This sense of discovery is a vital component of the new jewellery vista. The Diamond Producers Association's Lieberherr explains that what's important to millennial clients is the freedom to choose exactly what works for them. "They need to have a strong sense of ownership of their choices," he says, "and to make their own new associations, to mark real, rare moments and human connections." Pierre Rainero, director of style, image and heritage at Cartier, adds that accessible information is also key to millennials. Today, he says, "jewellery is part of an international shared culture. Clients nowadays are information hunters and very savvy. Connecting to this new generation is all about information being available."

This spirit of youthfulness, expanded cultural heritage, freedom of choice and emotional connection are now permeating the collections of established jewellery houses, which are embracing the blurring of boundaries between jewels and fashion, and jewels and body ornaments. Boucheron's 2016 high-jewellery collection (from £25,000), inspired by couture, features a striking

Left: Victoire de Castellane, creative director of Dior Fine Jewellery. Below: Dior rose gold and diamond Archi Dior ring, £10,500



Serpenti design has recently shaken off its 1960s jet-set glamour to reveal a graphic, edgier look aimed at a younger, cooler audience. The Serpenti pendant, a high-jewellery diamond-encrusted sautoir, now has rose-gold iterations worn long and loose on a gold chain, the snake head etched with hexagonal scales – some in skeletal openwork (example pictured far left, price on request), some with hypnotic almond-shaped eyes in ruby,

emerald or amethyst. Such thematic collections now cross the boundaries of fine and high jewellery.

This June, Chaumet launched a more casual “bijou” version of its Joséphine collection

(from £3,565) that’s tiara-inspired, with diamonds set in white gold, rose gold or platinum, and the Hortensia Aube Rosée collection (bracelet pictured far left, £9,282), in blush-pink floral compositions of opals and diamonds. At Dior, last year’s Archi Dior high-jewellery collection (ring pictured above, £10,500) is adapted into designs that interpret M Dior’s architectural principles of structure and silhouette in jewels that are pleated and draped. Behind the cool aesthetic is Victoire de Castellane (pictured above), creative director of Dior Fine Jewellery, an agent of change known for shaking up the jewellery establishment by fusing the arts of couture and high jewellery.

For Boucheron’s Poulit-Duquesne, this sort of creative innovation and mixing up of influences is the key to navigating the changes. “The less innovative get left behind,” she believes. “We have to conquer the unexplored.” ♦

“The idea of conservative jewellery for day and high jewellery for black-tie eveningwear is outdated”

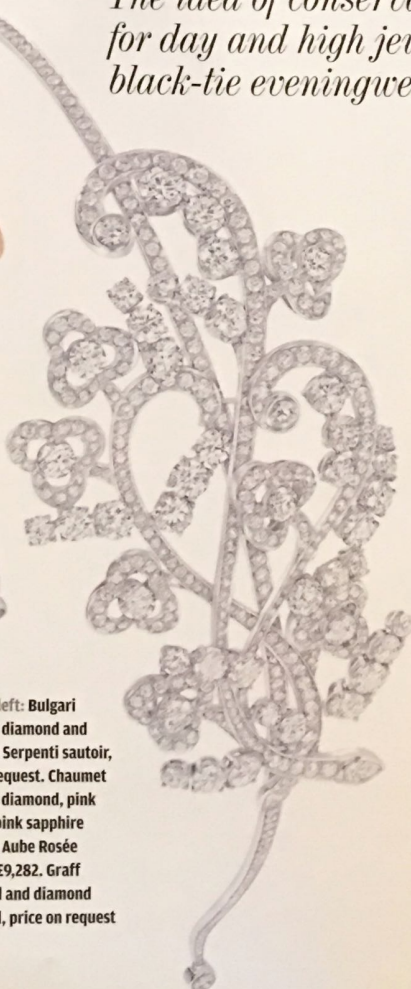


cape of scalloped gold openwork filled with shimmering, sensual gold chain (pictured on previous page), while Graff’s diamond Alice bands (price on request, example pictured right) have proved a huge success. “The idea of conservative jewellery for day and high jewellery for black-tie eveningwear is outdated,” says Boucheron’s Hélène Poulit-Duquesne, one of the first female CEOs on the Place Vendôme. “Women are wearing jewellery in a way that empowers and projects a very personal and defined sense of style day or night.”

High-jewellery collections are thus becoming more relaxed and versatile. At Moussaieff (prices on request), a new lightness, openness and delicacy sees necklaces that are long, fluid tasselled pendants in permutations of coloured gem beads (example pictured on previous page); a choker that traces curls of white and yellow diamonds on the skin, hung with a central yellow diamond briolette; and a lace-like bracelet “embroidered”, gem on gem, with flowers of pink and purple sapphires.

Bulgari’s senior director of high jewellery Giampaolo Della Croce tells how recently a young client asked for her cabochon blue sapphire to be hung on a more casual silk chord, so that she could have it on while skiing. “She had a clear idea of how to wear it.” The brand’s iconic

From top left: Bulgari rose gold, diamond and malachite Serpenti sautoir, price on request. Chaumet rose gold, diamond, pink opal and pink sapphire Hortensia Aube Rosée bracelet, £9,282. Graff white gold and diamond Alice band, price on request



TREADING A NEW PAVE

Boucheron, 164 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7514 9170; www.boucheron.com). **Bulgari**, 168 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7872 9969; www.bulgari.com). **Chaumet**, 174 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7495 6303; www.chaumet.com). **Dior**, 160-162 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7758 9280; www.dior.com). **Dover Street Market**, 18-22 Haymarket, London SW1 (020-7518 0680; www.doverstreetmarket.com). **Graff**, 6-8 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7584 8571; www.graffdiamonds.com). **Harrods**, 87-135 Brompton Rd, London SW1 (020-7730 1234; www.harrods.com). **Margaret**, 3 Quai du Mont-Blanc, 1201 Geneva (+4122-732 6640; www.margaret-jewels.com). **Messika**, www.messika.com and see Harrods and other stockists. **Moussaieff**, 172 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7290 1536; www.moussaieff.co.uk). **Nirav Modi**, www.niravmodi.com. **Repossi**, www.repossi.com and see Dover Street Market and other stockists.