

A CUT ABOVE JEWELRY

Dedication to originality and boldness

MUNICH

Hemmerle has a long history of blending stylish design with sophisticated fabrication

BY NAZANIN LANKARANI

The German jeweler Hemmerle spells out a simple credo on its Web site: "Copying can never be art, art is inspiration not imitation."

Not just an admonition to counterfeiters, the statement sums up the house's strictly disciplined, self-imposed dedication to originality.

"What our clients want is to be surprised. For that, we must constantly come up with new ideas," Christian Hemmerle said in an interview in Munich, where the family-owned business is based. "We never produce the same piece twice, nor one resembling it."

Mr. Hemmerle, a great-grandson of one of the founders, now shares in running the business with his wife, Yasmin, and his parents, Stefan and Sylveli.

Long hailed in Germany as one of the country's premier contemporary jewelry designers, the house of Hemmerle will have its contribution to jewelry history recognized internationally in Octo-

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ber, when its Harmony Bangle bracelet will join the permanent jewelry collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

The bangle, made in a red patinated copper, the ends capped with cherry-red, ruby-like pavé spinels, and with an intricately engineered seamless closure, is a consummate example of Hemmerle design: minimalist in concept, visually striking, precious without being ostentatious, mechanically innovative and perfectly executed.

"The red spinel gemstones are reminiscent of Queen Elizabeth's Timur Ruby, which makes this a particularly suitable choice for the V&A," Mr. Hemmerle said, referring to a famous stone that has belonged to the British royal family since it was presented to Queen Victoria in 1851.

"The Hemmerle bangle has been acquired by the V&A to show a distinctive and highly original voice which Hemmerle has brought to jewelry of the highest caliber in the last 40 years," Richard Edgcumbe, curator of the V&A's jewelry collection, wrote in an e-mail message.

The house of Hemmerle was founded in 1893,



Hemmerle shatters traditional notions of beauty by mixing everyday materials like copper, brass, iron, steel and wood with rare and precious stones like diamonds, melo pearls and lapis lingua.

HEMMERLE IMAGE

aesthetic transformation. "The turning point was a special commission by a Munich art collector looking for an unusual ring for his wife, who was fond of German iron jewelry," Mr. Hemmerle said.

Delving into history, Stefan Hemmerle revisited the tradition of iron work dating from the establishment of the Royal Berlin Foundry in 1804, and the finely crafted filigree cast-iron jewelry then associated with the Prussian capital.

"During the Napoleonic wars, Germans were asked to surrender their gold to fund the German war effort," Stefan Hemmerle said. "Those who did would receive iron jewelry in return, which they could wear as proof of their patriotic act."

Marrying that tradition with his own taste for bold design, he set his client's large diamond in an understated base of black iron, an irreverent combination that set the company on a new creative path.

Since then, it has been pushing the boundaries of jewelry design and shattering traditional notions of beauty and value with bold combinations that mix everyday materials like copper, brass, iron, steel and wood with rare and precious stones like diamonds, melo pearls and lapis lingua.

"There are no ordinary materials, only the beauty of nature," Christian Hemmerle said. "Traditional jewelers always repeat the same combination of emeralds, rubies, sapphires, and diamonds. They are tied to value. We are frankly bored with that."

To offset a piece centered on Kashmir sapphires — an extremely rare, blue stone from India — Hemmerle used river pebbles collected from the banks of the Isar River in Munich.

"My father sent a workman during his lunch hour over to the river to collect pebbles," Mr. Hemmerle said. "The result was spectacular."

Hemmerle has also been known to offset high-grade stones with acorns picked up in Central Park in New York, or with walrus teeth bought at a fossils fair, said Yasmin Hemmerle.

Though each piece is unique, Hemmerle has developed a signature feature, the tassel, which it frequently combines with knitted beads, an ancient Austrian tradition that Hemmerle has brought back from obscurity.

While it has distanced itself creatively from classical design, Hemmerle has scrupulously preserved the craft workmanship that has been a house tradition. "We make 400 pieces a year, all of them unique," Mr. Hemmerle said. "A single piece can easily take from 200 hours up to a year of labor."

Each piece is handmade in the 15-person workshop a few blocks from Hemmerle's boutique.

"Everyone in Europe is outsourcing. We prefer to stay close to home," Mr. Hemmerle said.

"Our clients are faithful," added Mrs. Hemmerle. "What they come for is a beautiful piece of German engineering."

still occupies. For the next two generations, it dabbled in military ornaments and insignia, its creations influenced by the rigorous discipline of the early 20th-century Bauhaus and New Objectivity design movements.

In 1995, when Stefan and Sylveli Hemmerle took control of the business, the company underwent an

Rarity of Art Deco work keeps prices buoyant

SINGAPORE

When the style lost its appeal, owners broke up fine pieces to recover the precious stones

BY SONIA KOLESNIKOV-JESSOP

When a Rubel Freres diamond bracelet with a distinctive multi-gem wave effect first appeared at Christie's New York in 2001, it fetched \$336,000. When the rare Art Deco band passed through Christie's again last October, it went for \$506,500 — near the lower end of its \$500,000 to \$700,000 estimate but still netting a nice profit for its owner despite the trauma, between times, of the worst economic crisis in decades.

Art Deco jewels, characterized by their clean cut and overtly angular design, have continued to perform well at auctions in recent years, "even at a time when the market is not at its best," said Francois Curiel, President of Christie's Switzerland and Chairman of Christie's Asia.

That is mainly because there is very little of it left on the market. Many art deco pieces were broken up after World War II, as the style went out of fashion and owners re-used the stones in new settings: "So, what's left today brings extremely high prices," Mr Curiel said.

At Christie's Geneva auction on May 12, a multi-colored 'Tutti Frutti' bracelet of the Art Deco period sold for just over 1 million Swiss francs, or about \$880,000, well above its 160,000 franc to 210,000 franc estimate. Other rare Art Deco pieces also performed well. A "Camelia" brooch, designed in about 1926 by Jeanne Boivin, the sister of the renowned French couturier Paul Poiret, sold for 159,000 francs against an estimate of 32,000 francs to 42,000 francs while a 1933 pair of "Coquillage Ailé" ear clips, shaped like winged shells, also by Ms. Boivin, sold for 68,750 francs against an estimate of 14,000 to 18,000 francs.

While some jewelry may be worth just the intrinsic value of its stones, Art Deco commands

While Art Deco is most typically associated with the geometric style, it also came under other influences, especially in the 1920s. "This was a time of great explorations around the world. You see influences from Egypt, China, Africa," Ms. Hubbard said. Art Deco designers, she said, sought to capture and recreate the exoticism of far away places, for a European and American audience.

The discovery of King Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922 ensured that ancient Egypt would be a major influence. India, and the opulence of its Maharajas, was another. "Cartier's Tutti Frutti style of jewels was a reworking of Mughal jewelry for a Western audience," Ms. Hubbard said. These flamboyant pieces became a signature of the house in the 1920s.



DENIS HAYOUN / DIODE

A diamond Camelia brooch, from about 1926, with an emerald leaf brooch, both designed by Jeanne Boivin.

One of the most striking examples, the "Hindu necklace" commissioned from Cartier by the U.S. heiress and socialite Daisy Fellowes in 1936, was almost certainly based on one the jeweler made in 1935 for the Maharajah of Patna.

"They did a very limited number of such pieces, so when they come up, they command high prices," Ms. Hubbard said.

Most Art Deco jewelry sales take place in New York and London, since U.S. and European collectors are the main buyers. But in recent years, demand has also developed in Asia. On June 1, Christie's will offer in its Hong Kong sale two Art Deco diamond bracelets by Cartier.

The auction house hopes to nurture similar interest amongst Middle Eastern buyers after including Art Deco pieces in its Dubai offering for the first time in April.

"Christie's was the first international auction house to establish jewelry auctions in Hong Kong in 1993 and those early auctions included a small amount of Art Deco jewelry. We now have avid collectors of important Art Deco jewelry all over South East Asia," said David Warren, international director of jewelry for Christie's Dubai. "The same growing interest in 1920s jewelry is likely to develop in the Middle East over time."

For the Dubai sale, Christie's chose pieces with Middle Eastern references, including a 1920s Cartier bracelet and brooch set decorated with a pierced Moorish geometric motif. They sold for \$86,500, well above the \$30,000 to \$40,000 estimate.

"What Cartier, and all the other major houses of the time did, was break with the past."

much more, reflecting the value set by collectors on its design, said Lisa Hubbard, a senior vice president in Sotheby's international jewelry division.

The Art Deco movement, which first appeared in the mid 1920s, permeated all aspects of popular culture, from fashion to architecture. In jewelry it sided defiantly with modernism in its clear, geometric lines, sharp angles, stark contrasts of light and dark, or hard all-white fields of platinum and diamonds.

"What Cartier, and all the other major houses of the time did, was break with the past. As women's hair was cut short and the fashion of the day was much less constructed, jewelry design also changed," Ms. Hubbard said. "You started seeing precious stones being mixed with hard stones, like quartz, jade, onyx. There was an added tactile aspect, with polished surfaces versus mat surfaces."



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