

# BEYOND THE GOLDEN AGE

Writer: Olivier Dupon

*Hemmerle Bangle in ebony, iron, silver and white gold set with diamonds. POA.*

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*“Challenging the borders of creativity has been my aim and I have come to realise that new design is not necessarily limited to new forms, but it can also be achieved with new materials”,  
Theodoros Savopoulos notes*

*Ring with one 3.10-carat emerald-cut diamond set on Lucite or acrylic glass (nothing else is involved in this extraordinary creation, where the diamond and synthetic material just seamlessly merge together) by Theodoros Savopoulos*

[www.instagram.com/theodoros\\_jeweler](http://www.instagram.com/theodoros_jeweler)

There is a sense of reaching towards something new or is it déjà vu? In any case, the resurgence of jewellery made with metals other than gold could certainly be labelled as a back-to-the-future phenomenon. Some forward-thinking private jewellers, famous for their high jewellery credentials, have indeed been toying with unconventional alloys or common metals that have an industrial or domestic application (aluminium, steel, copper or iron, etc). In what could be seen as a bold move that reconciles low and high-brow materials, these practitioners keep exploring the physical potential of those metals in order to broaden their creative scope.

*“Different philosophies and approaches to making jewellery can affect the choice of metals used. For many jewellers today, luxury does not mean the largest diamond or gold or platinum; true luxury lies in the craftsmanship, the design, the artistic sensibility. It directs itself more to aesthetics and less to the value inherent in a metal”, Mahnaz Ispahani Bartos head of Mahnaz Collection adds.*



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Caption - Chandelier Pendant Earrings in steel and 18K rose and white gold set with a cascade of D colour, Internally Flawless diamonds; each earring centres three pear-shaped diamonds and two round brilliant-cut diamonds, totalling 14.50 carats. POA.

[www.sothebysdiamonds.com](http://www.sothebysdiamonds.com)



It must be said that this trend concerns only independent jewellers, for they have a freedom that established high jewellery behemoths often lack. Moreover these private jewellers have discerning clientele, who often appreciate creations that are off the beaten track.

*“Our clients aren’t just jewellery collectors – they’re impressionist or contemporary art collectors who want to invest in something exceptional”, Patti Wong of Sotheby’s Diamonds says. “They want the diamonds to be as close to perfection as possible and “framed” by a contemporary and yet timeless design. They love our use of different materials and our approach to design.”*

In other words, the use of metals other than gold is nothing new, and it can be traced back to Ancient Egypt (5550 BC – 30 BC) with silver, bronze, tin and iron often used for weaponry, vessels, statues, amulets, thrones and of course jewellery. They even routinely used a naturally occurring alloy known as electrum (a combination of gold and silver with a small amount of copper). That said, gold was already the most coveted ore and allocated to the most prestigious applications; and this has not changed to this day, throughout different cultures and centuries of jewellery transformations.



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19th century Berlin Ironwork suite by Geiss, Germany, ca. 1830. POA and available at **A La Vieille Russie**, 745 Fifth Avenue (at 58th Street), 4th floor, New York, NY 10151, USA. [www.alvr.com](http://www.alvr.com)

Interestingly, there was a time when craftsmanship outweighed preciousness as seen in the success of cut-steel and Berlin Iron creations from the 19th century, illustrated here in the Berlin Ironwork suite by Geiss, Germany, ca. 1830. It can be found at A La Vieille Russie (the eponymous NYC-based retailer of European and American antique jewellery and antique Russian decorative art) and the team explains *“during the Prussian Wars of Liberation (1913-15), women famously supported the war effort by sacrificing their precious jewels for delicate and ornate ironwork pieces in order to help finance the war against Napoleon”*. This is a case of the ends justifying the means but what impresses is how the intricate lace-like designs work well in all its black cast-iron drama.

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More recently, during the past 50 years or so, the pursuit of metalsmithing has mostly been a thing for sculptor-cum-artist jewellers. *“Much earlier, in the early 1960s, advocates of artist-made and designer jewellery, such as Graham Hughes, who was Art Director of the Goldsmiths Company in London, argued that inexpensive materials (i.e. materials other than gold or platinum) did not mean that the jewel created with them was any less beautiful or artistically insignificant. This topic is the subject of our upcoming (April/May) New York exhibition “London Originals: The Jeweller’s Art in Radical Times” which traces the evolution of ideas about design, the craftsmanship, and the value of materials in jewellery”*, Mahnaz Ispahani Bartos head of Mahnaz Collection shares.

In the case of iron and steel, beyond their intrinsic properties – the former is strong and easy to shape when heated properly; the latter durable and light weight – artists and jewellers excel at exposing their inherent beauty, not something these metals were usually sought for. The following neckpiece by French jeweller Thierry Vendome is a signature of his style; rough (rust-ed iron) meets delicacy (pearls) as if the latter were growing out of the metal sheet. The gold is there just as an accent, a link or a scrap.



*A pearl, iron, and 18K gold necklace, by Thierry Vendome. POA and available at [www.mahnazcollection.com](http://www.mahnazcollection.com)*



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A black iron and gold damascene cuff designed as a fluid curling cuff-shaped bangle, composed of iron overlaid with high carat gold, circa 1984, designed by Angela Cummings for Tiffany & Co. Image and information courtesy of [www.symbolicchase.com](http://www.symbolicchase.com)



A black iron lacquer and inlaid 24K gold-checked cuff, by Angela Cummings for Tiffany & Co., c. 1980. POA and available at [www.mahnazcollection.com](http://www.mahnazcollection.com)



Likewise in these cuffs by Angela Cummings for Tiffany & Co., the black iron lacquer works hand-in-hand with the inlaid 24K gold.



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An 18K gold, diamond and patinated steel ring, by Gio Caroli. POA and available at [www.mahnazcollection.com](http://www.mahnazcollection.com)



Highly stylish pieces of vintage steelwork can also be found at Mahnaz Collection. They perfectly exemplify how the lowbrow steel endows elegant brutalism while framing, almost shielding, the diamond and yellow gold central disk. In this suite by Gio Caroli, steel turns out to be a protective halo, a ring-shaped mass that enhances the precious core.



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A pair of diamond, blackened steel and 18K gold earrings, by Gio Caroli. POA and available at [www.mahnazcollection.com](http://www.mahnazcollection.com)



A diamond, blackened steel, and 18K gold pendant, by Gio Caroli. POA and available at [www.mahnazcollection.com](http://www.mahnazcollection.com)



Mahnaz Ispahani Bartos head of Mahnaz Collection observes “Gio Caroli was an innovator in jewellery in Italy in the 1970s, during a period where yellow gold was almost universally used in fine jewellery. He was interested in making modern work that would express a new sensibility, so he juxtaposed gold with steel creating a bold effect marrying the heat of gold with the coolness of steel”.



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*Round Brilliant-Cut Steel Earrings, or a contemporary vision of the diamond ear-stud. In platinum and 18K rose gold, set with the purity of two perfect round brilliant-cut diamonds (12.79 carats and both H colour, VVS1 & VS2 clarity), rimmed with a fine line of pavé diamonds and edged in steel. Set in platinum and 18k rose gold. POA.*

[www.sothebysdiamonds.com](http://www.sothebysdiamonds.com)

When it comes to contemporary private jewellers, expect some jaw dropping renditions, since they have no qualms about pairing highly prized gemstones with domestic metals or rare components. Furthermore, it is the modern applications and potential of these metals that they tap into, how they can enhance the design and comfort of the jewel and how they can offer a groundbreaking alternative. Sotheby's Diamonds' **Steel Collection** is a paragon of expertise in that respect.

*"Sotheby's Diamonds' **Steel Collection** is where steel meets the king of gems. The process involves steel alloys from the early 20th century being hand-selected for their chemical composition so that when heated, the metal turns a spectacular lustrous hue. The process requires not only consummate skill but sensitivity and instinct: even a single degree too low or too high can dramatically alter the final colour", Sotheby's Diamonds shares.*



*Marquise-Cut Steel Ring in steel, platinum and 18K rose gold with one 5.15-carat D colour, Internally Flawless marquise-cut diamond set onto a powerful blackened steel band dotted with pavé-set diamonds, brings an edge to an enduring classic. POA.*

[www.sothebysdiamonds.com](http://www.sothebysdiamonds.com)



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*Emerald-Cut Steel Ring in steel, platinum and 18K rose gold set with a 5.18-carat, G colour, VS1 clarity, emerald-cut diamond set against dark and lustrous metal produces an audaciously modern yet classic ring. POA. [www.sothebysdiamonds.com](http://www.sothebysdiamonds.com)*



*“Due to the alloy’s variable compositions, no two effects are ever identical, creating a truly unique finished shade ranging from deep blue and green to violet and purple. Infused with the very same industrial and futuristic qualities associated with the metal in which they are set, today’s steel jewels are the latest incarnation of a rich historical legacy”, Sotheby’s Diamonds points out.*

*Chandelier Drop Earrings – a very modern take on chandelier earrings – in platinum and 18K rose gold featuring two superb D colour, internally flawless, Type IIa, pear-shaped diamonds (21.07 carats) and additional pavé-set diamonds. The modernity comes from the tailored steel settings contrasting with the feminine fluidity of the drop-shaped diamonds. POA. [www.sothebysdiamonds.com](http://www.sothebysdiamonds.com)*



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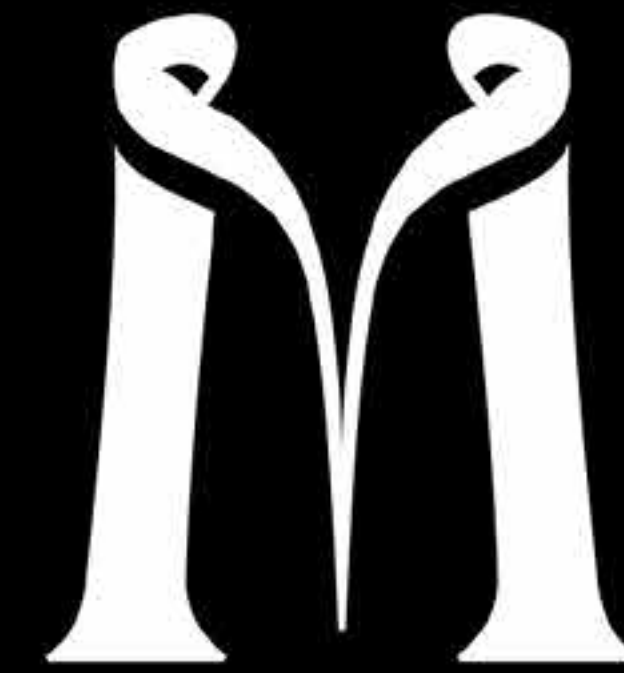
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One pair of Chandelier Earrings in titanium set with 2 sodalite drops (10.20cts and 10.69cts), 6 blue sapphire baguettes (4.33cts), 2 round blue sapphires (3.02cts), 8 rock crystals (33.33cts) and 210 round diamonds (2.14cts). POA. [www.glennspiro.com](http://www.glennspiro.com)

In mentioning earlier how some private high jewellers venture into uncharted territories by using rare components, I had Glenn Spiro in mind. The London-based maestro knows a thing or two when it comes to creating jewels that are not only beautiful, but which push the boundaries of being a high jeweller. Investigating the backstory of Spiro's creations is thus a necessity. Only he would have the bold insight to set exceptional diamonds – the Type Ila type – on a yarn rope. Yes! A rope... Here are a few other creations that exemplify this approach. Titanium is mixed with rock crystal and sodalite (a rare pure mineral), or natural horn.... *“There is a magic to marrying an industrial metal like titanium with the most exquisite gems available from mother earth. That said, we have been working for years with titanium, creating beautifully colour treated, extremely minimal metal work that perfectly complements the hues of the stones and is featherweight for the wearer, and it is true that this work has been central to the house signature”*, the team adds.



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*One Pair of Cream Coloured Horn Cuffs composed of one bangle in titanium set with 17 cream coloured horns (195.56cts), round light brown diamonds (6.52cts), and 1,405 brilliant-cut diamonds (10.24cts); and one bangle in titanium set with 17 cream coloured horns (193.51cts), round light brown diamonds (7.54cts) and 1,405 brilliant-cut diamonds (10.24cts). POA.*  
**www.glenspiro.com**



*One ring in bronze and 18K red gold set with one 10.01-carat marquise D IF type IIA (GIA) diamond and 92 brilliant-cut diamonds (0.24ct). POA.*  
**www.glenspiro.com**

*“We have always taken an unconventional approach to jewellery design, preferring to create one-off show-stopping pieces, rather than more commercial collections, and using unusual materials and metals is an extension of this. Our pursuit of the unique has led us to work with materials such as bronze, titanium, horn, ceramic and glass, and the resulting designs we’ve been able to achieve are magnificent”, the G by Glenn Spiro team says.*



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As seen in the previous spread, bronze is also a very interesting alloy compared to other materials since it offers corrosion resistance, the ability to withstand high temperatures, and good weldability. It will also change colour over time due to its copper content, and for some designers, this is the precise reason why it fits some of their heirloom designs. A jewel whose patina will gradually change is a jewel that will intimately accompany the wearer through the passing of time. This has not been lost on French private jeweller, Walid Akkad whose bronze cuff with yellow gold round inclusions has a deceptive beauty: the chosen patina for the bronze looks like noble wood. As always with his work, minimalism with soul is at play.

*Cuff in bronze with 18K yellow gold pastilles. POA.*  
**[www.walidakkad.com](http://www.walidakkad.com)**



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*Hemmerle Pegasus Earrings in aluminium and 18K white gold set with diamonds.*  
Sold. [www.hemmerle.com](http://www.hemmerle.com)

None better than Hemmerle, the German private jeweller celebrating its 125th anniversary this year, has pioneered the prevalence of aesthetics over the value inherent in a metal. More than any other high jeweller, the fourth-generation-run house has indeed championed the use of anodized aluminium – celebrated in the defining [AL] PROJECT in 2016 – brass, bronze, copper, iron and silver with or without gold and to great effect. Stefan Hemmerle himself tells the story of how the nineteenth century German Berlin iron movement, influenced by a client who did not like flashy jewellery, transformed his whole approach to design and led him to make a ring setting of a valuable diamond in textured iron.

A few of the designs created for the anniversary – and unveiled at Tefaf Maastricht in March – follow this approach, and cement further the “normalcy” of finding these metals in high jewellery.



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# DIOR

*Hemmerle Diamond Ring, centering one 18.80-carat VS2 cushion-cut brown diamond (GIA certified), mounted in white gold and copper, signed Hemmerle. POA and available at FD Gallery NYC. [www.fd-gallery.com](http://www.fd-gallery.com)*



*Hemmerle Earrings in copper and 18K white gold set with sapphires, spessartite garnets. POA. [www.hemmerle.com](http://www.hemmerle.com)*



*“Materials are our starting point and drive our creativity. We treasure hunt for stones or objects and then design around them. The sophistication of colour is integral to our aesthetic and sometimes classical materials are not enough for us to bring out all the different hues of a stone and utilise its full natural potential”, Christian Hemmerle explains.*

*“We therefore experiment with unconventional metals and woods to create the perfect setting. We have a determination to continually explore new ways to captivate our imagination and challenge our minds both aesthetically and technically. We study, research and sample a new material for as long as necessary to achieve a desired texture or colour.”*



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Hemmerle Earrings in aluminium and 18K white gold set with tsavorites. POA. [www.hemmerle.com](http://www.hemmerle.com)



Hemmerle Diamond Ring, centering one 7.84-carat K/L/M colour range, VVS clarity, cushion-cut diamond, mounted in a brushed aluminum finish and 18K white gold, signed Hemmerle, circa 2010. POA and available at FD Gallery NYC. [www.fd-gallery.com](http://www.fd-gallery.com)

“These metals offer different colour variations that are able to uniquely enhance the natural beauty of stones and other materials. We are constantly using new materials and in the last few years have increasingly used aluminium for its natural strength and lightness in weight”, says Christian Hemmerle.

“Its malleability enabled us to focus on innovation and create works which are delicate in design yet highly durable, whilst remaining true to our dedication to craftsmanship. Through a process of anodising, we have been able to create aluminium in a variety of hues that complement the natural colours of different gemstones.”



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A pair of aluminium, gold and diamond fan earrings by JAR. Image and information courtesy of [www.symbolicchase.com](http://www.symbolicchase.com)

One of the great high jewellers, a reference in the close knight world of wearable art, was one of the first to use aluminium. This certainly helps when a great master such as Joel Arthur Rosenthal, a.k.a. JAR, runs the show. When you think that titanium was once a difficult material to sell to collectors, imagine how ground-breaking opting for a light-weight industrial metal like aluminium would have been. So when JAR created pieces in aluminium, such as these fan-shaped earrings, it can have only helped pave the way for other private jewellers to follow suit and show that being experimentally brave pays off.



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Pop Series Earrings in aluminium and 18K pink gold, each set with 61 diamonds (1.63cts). POA.

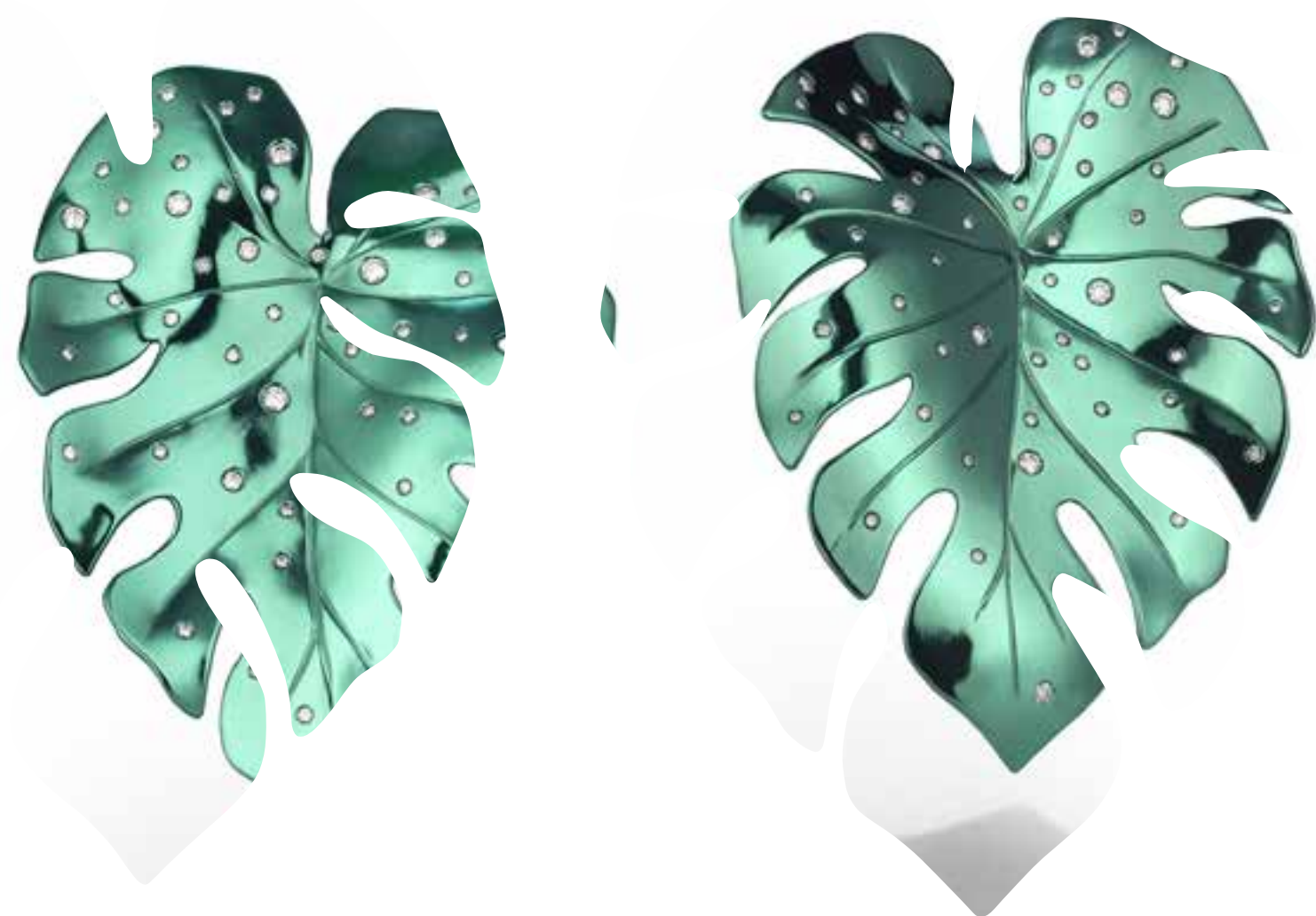
[www.suzannesyz.ch](http://www.suzannesyz.ch)



Aluminium goes hand-in-hand with titanium in the sense that jewellers, who are used to working with the latter, often adopt the former. This is the experience of Suzanne Syz who switches from one to the other depending on the final finishing and effect she desires in a piece. *“Aluminium and titanium are more or less similar in terms of weight (very light) but titanium is much harder than aluminium which is great for rings and bracelets. I love the different colours we can get with the titanium but what really pushed me to work with aluminium is the large range of colours that it can be”*, she shares.

*“From bright red to black or white. Blues, greens, yellows... and in different finishes: shiny or matt... The spectrum is much larger than titanium. So depending on the piece I am designing, I would choose one or the other.”*

*Hakuna Matata (number 790) Earrings in titanium and 18K pink gold set with 106 diamonds (1.98cts). POA.*  
[www.suzannesyz.ch](http://www.suzannesyz.ch)



*Hakuna Matata (number 796) Earrings in aluminium and 18K pink gold set with 1.11 carats of diamonds. POA.*  
[www.suzannesyz.ch](http://www.suzannesyz.ch)



And when asked what prompted her to explore material other than gold, Syz replies: *“For centuries gold, silver and a few other metals were used to create jewellery. We are now lucky to have a bigger variety of metals that can be used. To create pieces redolent of our time, we need to explore new material and techniques. I love the idea that bringing new metals or techniques into my creations make them true pieces of the 21st century, not only in their design but also in the way they are made.”*

*Edison’s Enlightenment (number 756) Earrings in aluminium and 18K white gold set with 128 diamonds (1.42cts). POA.*  
[www.suzannesyz.ch](http://www.suzannesyz.ch)



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THE LONDON JEWELLER

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Fibbia Cuff in carbon fibre set with diamonds. POA.  
[www.fabiosalini.it](http://www.fabiosalini.it)



Usually found in helicopters, aerospace vehicles, sporting goods and military equipment, carbon fibre is incredibly strong and seems destined exclusively for industrial projects. So how on earth has it found its way into one high jeweller's repertoire? *"Carbon fibre is very resistant, it allows volumes which are light, to create very thin inserts and inlays in gold and pavé set stones", says Fabio Salini, the Italian grandmaster, who introduced the polymer in his work early on.*

*"Its dark but silky texture perfectly combines with transparent and colourful gems, enhancing their beauty.. It is the perfect synthesis of my philosophy, which is to combine tradition and innovation."*



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A Coral and Diamond Ring by Fabio Salini, in carbon fibre and gold, centering a coral button with diamond details weighing 1.72 carats. POA and available at FD Gallery NYC [www.fd-gallery.com](http://www.fd-gallery.com)



The choice of carbon fibre almost seems political as Salini explains that it comes from the desire to revolutionise the language of jewellery. By replacing gold – whose attributes are clarity, brilliancy, weight, obviousness – with a new material that has the opposite features - black, light, matt, technological, inexpensive, unusual, it helps depose gold from its main position in jewellery. *“In fact, in these innovative creations, gold has lost its structural function (replaced by carbon fibre) and ends up with a purely decorative use”*, Salini stresses.



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Ring with a 17.81-carat cushion-cut Colombian emerald mounted in an 18K yellow gold, platinum and grey ceramic setting designed by TAFFIN. POA. [www.arcotfinance.com](http://www.arcotfinance.com)

Photography by Leo Bieber, [www.leobieber.co.uk](http://www.leobieber.co.uk)

Despite its more “romantic” appeal, ceramic is also a tough material with extreme hardness. It seems to be used in fine and high jewellery today, with or without gold, to add a layer of saturated colour, so much so that it could sometimes pass for enamel, or even stones (in black, it evokes onyx or black jade). In that respect, it comes close to painting, as designers are able to add chromatic touches with surgical precision. James Taffin de Givenchy has been one of the first designers to adopt coloured ceramic as coating on

gold. For him, it is a question of modernity, a wish to achieve unfussy, beautiful creations that resonate with today’s lifestyle. Arcot Finance, the “*bespoke business that provides exceptional quality and service*”, understands very well that there is a desire for high jewellery to be more suitable for everyday. By pairing with renowned private jewellers to design one-of-a-kind renditions around exceptional gemstones that Arcot Finance sources and owns, the company is a modern day patron and matchmaker.



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*Chanel Code Coco Watch with steel and black ceramic case, steel bezel, black lacquered dials, one set with one princess-cut diamond, steel and black ceramic bracelet, high precision quartz movement, water resistance: 30 meters. **CHANEL Watches, CODE COCO** collection. POA. [www.chanel.com](http://www.chanel.com)*

*Camélia Galbé Ring in 18K white gold set with one brilliant-cut diamond and black ceramic. **CHANEL Fine Jewelry.** POA. [www.chanel.com](http://www.chanel.com)*



*The Daylight Lotus Ring in white ceramic and 18K rose gold echoes the energy and warmth of the Sunrise; the bold contrast of ceramic colour and texture honours the diamonds' brilliance and creates a graphic interpretation of the feminine Enchanted Lotus motif; **Enchanted Lotus Ceramic Band Daylight.** POA and available from [www.debeers.co.uk](http://www.debeers.co.uk)*



Ceramic is probably the least 'unconventional' material in this review and it is why it has been readily adopted by most of the established luxury houses. It is now part of the luxury codes of these brands, especially CHANEL who has mostly embraced ceramic in black (a perfect fit for the camellia emblem). At the recent Basel World show, Chanel Code Coco Watch made its debut with a steel and black ceramic case, a new version that oozes sensuality. DE BEERS have also made wonders with the material in particular in their iconic **Enchanted Lotus Collection**. Just imagine how smooth the ring must feel on the skin.



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Capri Necklace by Pomellato, in 18K rose gold and turquoise ceramic with amethysts; **Capri Collection**. POA. [www.pomellato.com](http://www.pomellato.com)



Capri Rings by Pomellato, 18K rose gold and black ceramic with blue sapphires; 18K rose gold and pink ceramic with rubies; 18K rose gold and white ceramic with tsavorites; 18K rose gold and turquoise ceramic with amethysts. **Capri Collection**. POA. [www.pomellato.com](http://www.pomellato.com)



Serpenti Spiga Ceramic Watch with a five tour black ceramic bracelet with 18K rose gold inserts set with brilliant-cut diamonds; black ceramic case topped by 18K rose gold bezel set with brilliant-cut diamonds; 18K rose gold crown set with cabochon-cut rubellite, polished black-lacquered dial; Bvlgari-personalised high-precision quartz movement; **Serpenti Spiga Ceramic Collection**. POA. [www.bulgari.com](http://www.bulgari.com)

The unsurpassed gloss effect that can be obtained with ceramic is what these designers are looking for. When rendered with pretty colours ceramic is delectable. Opt for strong hues (black, hot red), and it turns sexy. Among ravishing creations with ceramic is POMELLATO's **Capri Collection**, an invitation to sea, sun and dolce vita! Here ceramic pebbles are like candy. As for dramatic renditions comes the Serpenti Spiga Ceramic Watch line by BVLGARI, and especially a new version that will spin your head. In this new creation, the black ceramic bracelet wraps around the forearm five times (it is twice for the simpler version). You won't need to wear anything else.



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Ring in 18K white gold and red ceramic set with 2 marquise-cut diamonds; **Diamonds in Red Collection**. POA. [www.ethomaria.com](http://www.ethomaria.com)



Ring in 18K white gold and red ceramic set with 3 oval-cut diamonds; **Diamonds in Red Collection**. POA. [www.ethomaria.com](http://www.ethomaria.com)



Ring in 18K white gold and red ceramic set with 3 pear-cut diamonds; **Diamonds in Red Collection**. POA. [www.ethomaria.com](http://www.ethomaria.com)



A bolder use of ceramic comes courtesy of jeweller Etho Maria. Inspired by the intense emotional power of the colour red, they have married pear-, marquise-, oval-, and round-cut diamonds with vivid red ceramic. “The newly launched **Diamonds in Red Collection** embodies a passion for life, love, and a distinct affinity for fashion”, the team says. Each diamond looks like a heart irrigated by a vital flow.



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