

BRIGHT THINGS

PAPAL PINKY RINGS / BAROQUE ABBONDANZA / IS THAT A TURRELL ON YOUR NECK?

The coin of the realm? A statement necklace inspired by history. BULGARI HIGH JEWELRY BAROCKO COLLECTION TREASURE NECKLACE, BULGARI.COM

The Long GAME

Centuries later and Rome is still at it, inspiring visionaries and jewelry dreamers.

BY JASON HOROWITZ

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAOLA PANSINI



A year ago, international high rollers celebrated Bulgari's 135th anniversary and new collection at a major show at the Castel Sant'Angelo, the ancient fortress across the Tiber from the Roman jewel house's headquarters. This year no exhibit is planned; the new collection can be tried on only virtually, with a specially designed app. To be allowed to see the stones in person, I needed to take a blood test.

The coronavirus has hit high jewelry, too, but Bulgari believes that through plagues and other assorted scourges, some things—namely diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, and pearls—are forever.

"Jewels have existed since the birth of man. As long as there have been people, they have sought to adorn things," said Lucia Silvestri, Bulgari's creative director. She added that the beauty and the energy of the one-of-a-kind jewels she designed "kept me good company in the house during Covid."

Silvestri spoke to me earlier this year as she held up a string of stones, each the size of a walnut shell, surrounded by emerald beads and 131 diamonds. Like the rest of the High Jewelry Barocko Collection, she said, the Cabochon Exuberance necklace ("one of my favorites, a precious work of art") was inspired by the heyday of the Italian Baroque as she took in the "light, color, and wonder" of Rome in the summer. She compared the polished curves of tanzanites, tourmalines, rubellites, and aquamarines to architectural cupolas; she literally lost her breath as she slipped it on.

It was a warm June morning at the Villa Aurelia, originally built in the 17th century for Cardinal Girolamo Farnese, whose family's gardens inspired the necklace's settings. ("*Mai troppo*," read the brochure explaining Bulgari's approach. "Never too much.") The villa later became a candle factory for a count and a fort for Giuseppe Garibaldi's Roman Republic.

It now belongs to the American Academy of Rome, which in 2006 rented it out for Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes's rehearsal dinner. ("May Katie and Tom enjoy the happiness and joy of married life," Holmes's father toasted then, alas.) In 2019 the villa's umbrella pines spread over the wedding of the designer Misha Nonoo to oil scion Michael "Mikey" Hess, as paparazzi angled for photos of the guests, which included working non-royals Ivanka Trump and



It's frescoes like this one, by the Baroque painter Pietro da Cortona at the Palazzo Barberini, that inspired Bulgari's new Barocko collection.

Jared Kushner and nonworking royals Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. Those were simpler times.

Now, in a room that is protected by armed guards and has an eight-person capacity, masked employees assembled plastic trays as if they were at the world's most expensive Tupperware party. Silvestri showed off the new collection, flipping the necklaces over to show the exquisite workmanship of the yellow, white, and rose gold settings. During their making, she challenged Bulgari's arti-

sans to go thinner and lighter to make room for more jewels, even as lockdown slowed production and reduced the number of pieces to about 120.

One showstopper was the Emerald Corset, a necklace with a pendant that can be detached and worn as a brooch. It sparkled with nine cabochon-cut emeralds and ribbons of pear-shaped and pavé-set diamonds. The arches of the Galleria Farnese planted the seed that led to Festa, a bib necklace of 51 rubellite beads, 42 amethyst beads, and 92 round brilliant-cut diamonds and pavé-set diamonds. ("I'm very proud of it," Silvestri said.) Next came a coin minted in 323 BC in the kingdom of Macedon, set in a platinum necklace with Akoya cultured pearls, diamonds, and rubies. The jewels kept coming; they included Bulgari's new take on its classic Serpentine watch, a wristband glistening in diamonds.

As I got up to leave, and douse my hands in more sanitizer, I spied a ring called Joyful Color: a green tourmaline surrounded by buff-top amethysts, buff-top rubellites, buff-top turquoises, and pavé-set diamonds. It definitely had a Baroque appeal. I slipped it on and immediately felt like a Farnese *eminenza*. Or as if I had graduated from some extremely blingy high school. Or won the Super Bowl. Or mugged Liberace. Or killed Jimmy Hoffa. I wondered who would wear such hardware—and also where such a person would wear it in a suspended world deprived, however temporarily, of Met Galas, Oscar red carpets, and oligarchic bacchanals.

Then I looked up at Silvestri taking another coy-faced selfie, adorned in her creations. She was right: They make good company. T&C

BAROQUE BIJOUX

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ARTHUR KING VINTAGE BAROQUE SOUTH SEA PEARL, DIAMOND, AND 18K YELLOW AND WHITE GOLD RING (\$30,000), MAHNAZCOLLECTION.COM



A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE ANTIQUE BAROQUE PEARL AND OLD-MINE DIAMOND DOG FIGURINE & PENDANT (\$42,000), ALVR.COM



ELIZABETH GAGE BAROQUE SOUTH SEA CULTURED PEARL NECKLACE (\$54,000), ELIZABETH-GAGE.COM



Artist James Turrell's *Open Sky* installation inspired this necklace from Boucheron's Contemplation collection. **BOUCHERON** FENÊTRE SUR CIEL TANZANITE, LACQUER, MOTHER-OF-PEARL, AND DIAMOND NECKLACE, BOUCHERON.COM

the ephemeral. For Boucheron's 2018 Nature Triomphante collection, she transformed real flowers into exquisite jewels using 3D printing technology. Seizing passing clouds, though, would require imagining fine jewelry in a wholly different context.

It took Choisine two years to complete the Fenêtre sur Ciel necklace (left), a featherlight titanium scarf that is covered with tiny flecks of diamond and mother-of-pearl and then airbrushed with 30 microscopically thin layers of lacquer to create the effect of swirling clouds and blue sky. It's sensuous, poetic, and the pièce de résistance in Boucheron's new high jewelry collection, Contemplation.

"The concept of Contemplation is very apropos today, now that many of us have been in quarantine with time to appreciate nature and the little moments," says Choisine, who relocated to her country house in Portugal during the pandemic. "The need to be outside became very real. And the best designs are already there."

The new collection is more than just an expression of the outdoors. It is imbued with emotion and movement, and it grasps the fleeting, intangible beauty of the natural world. A delicate dandelion necklace made of titanium threads and tiny diamonds quivers with movement; wisps of carved mother-of-pearl feathers appear to bow in the wind; subtle shades of gray, white, and blue lend purity, softness, and lightness.

This spirit of innovation follows the vision of Frédéric Boucheron, who established the house on Paris's Place Vendôme in 1858 and introduced concepts that were more modern and bold than those of his peers. He combined diamonds with humble rock crystal, for instance, and turned a peacock feather motif into a supple design that curves around the neck like a question mark. When Choisine joined the maison nearly a decade ago, she studied the vast archives, which made her feel free to continue to conjure new ideas without boundaries. "That is the magical part of my job," she says. "To see the dream come true." **T&C**

LOOK UP!

Many find creative inspiration in art. Few can make something like this from it. BY JILL NEWMAN

Three years ago, on a visit to Naoshima, Japan's remote island paradise for contemporary art lovers, Claire Choisine, Boucheron's creative director, spent hours in deep contemplation in the James Turrell installation *Open Sky*, gazing at the heavens above through an aperture in the ceiling. Turrell's works tend to have that meditative effect on people. For Choisine it was a life-changing moment, one she was determined to capture and channel into something lasting.

As a dreamer and alchemist, Choisine already has a track record of immortalizing