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What Jewelers Mean When They Say Green

HOW THE JEWELRY INDUSTRY IS BECOMING A LEADER IN GREEN SOURCING AND MANUFACTURING

BY PATRICK TOTTY, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



"NOAH'S HEART" CLIFF BRACELET BY DEANNA COCHRAN, HAND CARVED AND HAND FORMED IN RECLAIMED FINE .999 SILVER WITH CONFLICT FREE ROUGH CUT DIAMONDS, SUGGESTED RETAIL \$700, (214) 334-6461, WWW.DEANNACOCHRANJEWELRY.COM. SALES FROM THE NOAH'S HEART COLLECTION BENEFIT MD ANDERSON'S PEDIATRIC CANCER RESEARCH.

When people say “green” and “the environment” endlessly these days, they assume that everybody knows their definitions. But for jewelers and their suppliers, what does “being green” or “environmentally aware” really mean?

The answer, it turns out, is that more than almost any other industry, the jewelry industry is conscious of how heavily its processes impact people and the

earth. The distinct green trends within it are like pieces of a mosaic that are just now being assembled. The portrait that’s emerging depicts a new sensibility among consumers and producers about jewelry in particular and life in general:

- Consumers, younger ones especially, are asking more and more for “responsible” jewelry.
- Some designers have been buying and manufacturing “green” for some time, but

didn’t realize it until green recently became a general topic of discussion.

- The industry is rapidly increasing its engagement in such eco-friendly practices as “fair trade,” “conflict free,” and “green gold.”

- Certification is coming on at all levels, from ore and gems that meet fair trade requirements to refiners seeking third party validation to retailers presenting documentation to customers that the jewelry they’re selling has an honorable pedigree.

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*"FIFTY PERCENT OF THE BRIDAL SETS I MAKE ARE FROM GREEN GOLD.
YOUNGER CUSTOMERS ASK FOR IT."*

— Stephan Hوجلund, Grand Marais, Minnesota

HAND-FORGED SILVER CUFF WITH A CAST FERN LEAF BY STEPHAN HOGLUND, SUGGESTED RETAIL \$395, (218) 387-1752, WWW.STEPHANHOGLUND.COM.

• Recycling will soon extend to gems. For example, Hoover & Strong plans to begin selling diamonds that have been recycled from jewelry pieces that haven't sold.

• Local gemstones may become like the local food movement—jewelry will feature notable "pride of place" local gems that may not be available elsewhere.

DESIGNERS FIND THEIR OWN GREEN PATHS

Sometimes you can be green and not know it. In late November, jewelry designer Jessica Fields sent out an e-mail blast to customers and colleagues announcing, "Jessica Fields Goes Green!" Although the announcement was the first time that New Jersey-based Fields had ever mentioned green, she had been using eco-friendly gold for a considerable time, as well as buying free trade gemstones and

working with a diamond dealer who follows the Kimberley Process for acquiring conflict free diamonds. "I think my green sensitivity was always there and I don't think the worldwide push to go green had that much of an effect on it," she says.

In Minnesota, designer and custom jeweler Liz Bucheit had "always been green in the sense that I recycle gold to avoid messing with the earth. When green became big, I realized I had been green all along." But Bucheit, who lives and works in an 800-person town that's popular with artists and art tourists, says her customers have also helped her green awareness. "I do well with engagement jewelry and find that people 30 years and younger ask intelligent and concise questions about the origins of the materials I use. They're a sophisticated clientele,

and selling jewelry is almost like having an audition with them. Can we disclose where we got our diamonds? What's the source of our gold?"

For Washington, D.C.-based designer Alberto Parada, "thinking green" began in 2006 when clients came to him asking about eco-friendly pieces. "They may not have quite known what they had in mind when they made the request, but they'd often refer to things like renewable bamboo floors as examples," says Parada. "So I started doing research on mining practices and other aspects of producing eco-friendly jewelry. How did miners extract metals and treat their workers? Where did gems come from? Did they have conflict free origins and involve fair trade? Then I looked for manufacturers I could visit to see their recycling processes."

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THE SEARCH FOR GREEN MATERIALS

Michelle Dené Reagan, owner of Dené Jewelry in Chicago, epitomizes how far many designers will go in their commitment to use only vetted materials. “We have a rigorous sourcing policy in place and we work with others who are passionate about ethical sourcing,” Dené says she will not buy gemstones whose origin or treatment she can’t trace. “I won’t buy diamonds from sources who don’t meet our requirements, and although it’s much cheaper to manufacture overseas I cannot condone unfair, or in some cases near-slave, labor.”

Thinking green has also pushed designers to look for non-toxic materials. Plano, Texas-based designer DeAnna Cochran works from a home studio where she has to worry about a three year old running about. “I use very traditional processes, but the problem is that they’re highly toxic. So I was forced to find a non-toxic process that doesn’t create fumes, even in the kiln. That way I wouldn’t have to kick everybody out of the house.”

One answer she found was “precious metal clay,” a non-toxic compound derived from metals reclaimed from cell phones, PCs, film negatives, and X-rays. “I saw that PMC was a new material to work with, loved that it was from recycled materials, and found it was no different in handling.”

As conscientious as contemporary designers try to be, it’s hard being green—that is, achieving 100 percent success in using strictly fair trade materials or non-toxic processes. “The whole green movement in the jewelry industry is interesting because it’s hard to make jewelry totally eco-friendly,” says Fields. “I try my best to buy fair trade stones, but that’s not always possible. Small designers like me don’t have the pull to make big refiners or manufacturers change their practices.”

Parada says that his ideal is 100 percent free trade gems and recycled metals, but that’s not always possible. “Right now my main issue is finding chains from recycled

“I STARTED DOING RESEARCH ON MINING PRACTICES AND OTHER ASPECTS OF PRODUCING ECO-FRIENDLY JEWELRY.”

— Alberto Parada, Washington, D.C.



“ALMA” RINGS IN TRICOLOR HARMONY 18K GOLD WITH FAIR TRADE CONCAVE CUSHION CUT CITRINE AND AMETHYST IN HIGH BEZELS BY ALBERTO PARADA JEWELRY, SUGGESTED RETAIL \$1,800, (202) 333-5575, WWW.ALBERTOPARADA.COM.

sources—their manufacturing process is harder and more elaborate. But everything else I make is 100 percent handmade from recycled or fair trade materials.”

The desire to be scrupulous about source materials often extends into other parts of designers’ businesses. Cochran says that even in her marketing, she tries to be eco-friendly. “My packaging and brochures are printed on recycled material. On my back-office stuff I make sure things are printed on both sides of recycled paper. I try to send out most documents via e-mail, and avoid packaging things as much as possible.”

THE DAWN OF A LOCAL GEM MOVEMENT?

Other designers are pioneering new ways to look at jewelry. Just as the “local food” movement is converting consum-

ers to the idea that they should focus on locally produced food and drink, Grand Marais, Minnesota, designer Stephan Hoglund offers jewelry in his store made from the marvelous native gems he has found on the shores of Lake Superior. “Lake Superior gemstones, such as thomsonite, chlorastrolite, and eye agates are of such great beauty,” says Hoglund. “There’s a craze for the agates and I’m always looking for small ones.”

Hoglund has run into other designers that emphasize use of local gemstones, but thinks it can be a hit or miss proposition. He cites Yogo sapphires from Montana as “probably the best in the world,” but too rare to ever make more than a small splash in the greater scheme of things. “The problem with regional stones is that they need to be plentiful

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GREEN Glossary

enough to sustain great popularity. Lake Superior stones haven't even reached regional popularity."

Being green for Hoglund occurred by default. "The stones I use are found on the surface, so gathering them involves no mining or disturbances of the landscape. Also living here, 250 miles north of Minneapolis, makes me live greener by default." Several years ago Hoglund started buying "green" gold from Oro Verde in Colombia. "The miners there practice traditional panning and sluicing—there's no leaching, strip mining or industrial processes involved, and whatever land is disturbed is restored and rehabilitated. Fifty percent of the bridal sets I make are from green gold. Younger customers ask for it."

Hoglund says his shop, a combination rock-hound emporium, museum, jewelry store, and factory, has become a natural gathering place for locals. It's the same for Bucheit: "There's a sensory and social aspect to what we do. Our shop is open to the selling floor so that customers can hear our hammering and see the flames from our manufacturing process. Locals love to come in and see what's going on."

ORGANIZATIONS RISE TO ENCOURAGE, CERTIFY, INNOVATE

The green movement has inspired non-profit organizations that serve to encourage its spread. "No other industry has taken as clear a stand on monitoring its supply chain as the jewelry industry," says Catherine Sproule, COO of Responsible Jewelry Council in Toronto, Ontario, founded in 2005 and one of the first non-profits to take a direct approach to ethical sourcing.

"Our first three years we were in a research and development phase, developing standards, guidelines, and a code of practices. Over the next three to five years I think showing the kind of consciousness that those guidelines imply will become an imperative among jewelry industry members."

Sproule says the two pillars of the now 90-member organization's growth "has

• **Conflict free:** Gems, particularly diamonds, that are certified to have come from sources that do not use the sales proceeds to buy weapons or carry on armed struggles.

• **Fair trade:** A term originally applied to agricultural products produced overseas, fair trade in the jewelry industry refers to the payment of a fair price for gems or precious metals produced by free workers in a sustainable and environmentally sensitive manner. Green gold is one example.

• **Green gold:** Gold mined under contract with small communities that use traditional, non-intensive and non-disruptive mining methods, such

as panning or sluicing (as opposed to excavation or hydraulic mining).

• **Green refining and reclamation:** The recycling of raw materials, usually precious metals, but increasingly gems, to avoid mining, and the reclamation of materials used in refining, such as chemicals and water.

• **Kimberley Process:** A U.N. supported international agreement drafted in Kimberley, South Africa, that dates from 2000. It governs the certification of diamonds by countries that export diamond rough. Exporters must certify that the rough has a legal origin and has not been used to benefit military, terrorist, or paramilitary groups.

"WE HAVE A RIGOROUS SOURCING POLICY IN PLACE."

— Michelle Dené Reagan, Dené Jewelry, Chicago



DENÉ JEWELRY'S "TRUE COLORS" COLLECTION IN 14K RECLAIMED GOLD, CONFLICT FREE DIAMONDS, AND FAIR TRADE SOURCED GARNET, PERIDOT, BLUE TOPAZ, CITRINE AND SAPPHIRE, AND AMETHYST. SUGGESTED RETAIL \$2,000, (800) 577-3363, WWW.DENEDESIGN.COM

been at opposite ends of the supply chain: the mining sector, often thousands of miles away, and the retailer, at the last 18 inches, the most crucial part of the supply chain. Now the mid part of the supply chain has come forward." She adds that while RJC has large national chain members, such as Ben Bridge and Zale,

it is also looking to attract independent chains and one-store operations.

Another group, Ethical Metalsmiths, concentrates on fair trade metals sourcing. Co-founder Christina Miller, assistant professor of jewelry and metalsmithing at Millersville University in Pennsylvania, says, "When we first started talking about



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TSAVORITE AND 18K GOLD PENDANT, SUGGESTED RETAIL \$1,190, AND DIAMOND AND TSAVORITE PENDANT, SUGGESTED RETAIL \$1,350, BY RHONDA FABER GREEN FROM THE LIMITED EDITION "GREEN FOR GREEN" COLLECTION TO BENEFIT THE ALLIANCE FOR CLIMATE PROTECTION, (310) 858-8688, WWW.RHONDAFABERGREEN.COM.

ethical sourcing, people were scared. Either because it was something new—yet another issue to digest—or they felt they were part of the problem and didn't know how to respond. We realize that for many jewelers what they really want is to know how to buy right, not necessarily to have to know all of the background."

To help draw jewelers, and their customers, into the right frame of mind, Ethical Metalsmiths' co-founder Susan Kingsley has put on three "Radical Jewelry Makeover" events across the country where people contribute old jewelry pieces whose metal is recycled and then converted into sometimes whimsical, often very artistic "new" jewelry.

PUSHING RECYCLING

"Five years ago," says Torry Hoover, "jewelers started coming to us and asking, 'Can you guarantee that your gold is recycled?'" Hoover is president of 96-year-old Hoover & Strong, the Richmond, Virginia-based refiner in the forefront of the

industry's green movement. "At the time, we couldn't answer yes because we were getting a lot of gold in bullion form from banks and other sources. We just didn't know where some of our gold came from. So we started segregating by origin."

Four years ago, when the company had reached about 80 percent recycled metals, Hoover saw this was an enduring trend. "As we got more customers, segregation became harder, so we asked ourselves, 'What would it take us to get to 100 percent recycled so we wouldn't have to segregate?' So we found other sources, such as other refiners who could vouch for their sources, and went to 100 percent recycled gold. Later we went on to platinum, palladium, and silver." Two years later, the company, sensing the power of branding, labeled its recycled metals "Harmony Gold."

The company's next step will be to offer government-certified diamonds from Canada as part of its Harmony Diamonds line. "Beyond that, we're looking at the

"WE'VE SEEN MORE AWARENESS ABOUT GREEN, ESPECIALLY AMONG FOLKS IN THEIR 20S AND 30S."

— Judy Brown, Brown Goldsmiths, Freeport, Maine

market for recycled diamonds, where we take diamonds from jewelry that didn't sell, pull them out of their old settings and resell them as finished loose stones. Recycling them lessens pressure on the environment from mining."

THE RIGHT CHOICE TO MAKE

Retail jeweler Judy Brown says she and her husband, Steve, started going green almost 30 years ago when they realized their daughters were "born environmentalists." At Brown Goldsmiths, their store in Freeport, Maine, being green includes working only with vendors who disclose gem treatments and the origins of their materials.

It also means either recycling onsite metals or buying them from refiners who can guarantee their product. Doing so has produced some pleasant results. "We recently made a piece, using totally recycled gold from our own scrap, with a Canadian diamond as the centerpiece," says Brown. Word got around and the Browns began noticing that younger people were impressed with the store's ethic. "We've seen more awareness about green, especially among folks in their 20s and 30s, who come in and order jewelry from us because they like the idea of what we're doing."

The Browns work on a bigger stage, too. Members of the Responsible Jewelry Council since 2006 and closely associated with South African-based philanthropies, the couple sees a difficult task in spreading a green ethic—but one they're willing to undertake. "It's important to find ways to reward and honor vendors who are ethical in difficult economic times," says Brown. "We're not flashy folks, but we'll just keep on trying to tell the story." ♦