



Passage to India

Indian history and style is
influencing today's jewelers.

BY BETH BERNSTEIN

If you tune into red carpet events or the seasonal European and American runway shows, then you've witnessed the revival of Indian influences in everything from fine jewelry to fashion. Authentic period jewelry is being sold over estimates at top auction houses and contemporary jewelry designers are reinterpreting traditional styles. India's export business of loose diamonds, gemstones and colored beads is also booming.

We spoke with Rahul Kadakia, senior vice president of jewelry for Christie's U.S. about the resurgence of India as a major influence in the luxury market.

Can you give us a brief history of Indian Jewelry?

In India, jewelry has always been a way of life. The great temples and architecture were inspired by early emperors' jewels, and vice versa. Mughal (or Moghul) jewelry dates back to the 16th through 18th centuries, and is characterized by enamel and gem set stones such as table or rose-cut diamonds,

These elegant, vintage Bhagat diamond and ruby flower ear clips, mounted in platinum sold at Christies Auction House this spring for over \$300,000.

emeralds and rubies in very fine high-karat gold. The stones were backed with foil to add more life to these early cuts and the pieces were enameled on the back so the gold would not wear down from touching the skin.

Interestingly, there are some precious stones we value today, that you won't find in Mughal jewelry. You will never see authentic Mughal jewelry with sapphires, for example, because in Indian astrology, there are nine stones connected to nine planets and the sapphire was representative of a very powerful planet. If this stone didn't work for a person astrologically, then he/she would be stricken with bad luck.

In the 1920's, the Maharajahs either inherited these regal and intricate Mughal pieces from their predecessors or acquired the jewelry from trade dealers. Mughal jewelry is the most recognizable and, in present day, the most desired by Middle Eastern sheiks and wealthy Chinese bidders when it comes up at auction.

Pearl jewelry with gemstone accents was also a favorite of Indian royalty. Emeralds mined in Colombia were cut and engraved with prayers in India. The Golconda mines in South Central India (Hyderabad) were famous for extremely white diamonds with an innate purity. What's left of Golconda diamond jewelry today (the mines haven't produced in over a century) is on display at museums or kept in private collections.

When did India first become an influence on Western jewelry?

It was during the phase in the Art Deco movement when pieces began to be inspired by Asia and Egypt. In the late 1920's through the 30's, Cartier and Van Cleef & Arpels began using old Indian materials and stones to create intricate, original pieces of jewelry.

Can you speak more about how jewelry was a way of life in India?

When royal families married off their daughters, they gave a gift of jewelry to the husband's family as a way of saying thank you for taking care of their daughter, and for bringing both families together. Later on, jewelry became the dowry choice throughout all social levels in India, ranging from the most basic forms of gold jewelry to more ornate diamonds, pearls and gemstone-encrusted pieces. Jewelry is also given to mark almost every special occasion, from birthdays and anniversaries to graduations.

Where would you suggest jewelry aficionados in India go to see everything from rough-cut finished pieces and get a true flavor of the I would recommend the northern state of Rajasthan, to the city of Jaipur. Almost 70 percent of the colored beads and gemstones in India—such as rubies, sapphires and emeralds—are produced, cut and finished in Jaipur. Udaipur, which is also in Rajasthan, is home

to the Taj Mahal and other incredible palaces and architecture that shouldn't be missed.

Bombay is the commerce capital and where you can see a bit of everything. There's a big business vibe here, while Surap (located north of Bombay in the state of Gujarat) is more charming, and is where the smaller diamonds are cut (Gujarat was also once home to most of the Indian diamond dealers who have relocated to Antwerp in recent years).

Why is India seeing such a resurgence, particularly jewelry?

When we talk about authentic Mughal pieces, they have always been desirable to true collectors of wealth and status, but they have become harder to find. This has produced even greater demand for them, and has opened up a whole new market for fine replicas and reproductions. Viren Bhagat, for example, is the most famous and stylish contemporary jeweler in Bombay. He uses only old Indian gemstones and diamonds and has a big following among people in India who like Mughal-inspired designs. In the U.S., his creations are only sold through auction at Christies.

As far as the stones are concerned, when brilliant and emerald-

cut diamonds were first perfected in the early 20th century, people became very excited about the newness, sparkle and vibrancy. I think that women have a similar feeling today for the new cutting of rose and cushion diamonds. They look fresh again, and have charm and character. They are also cut from finer rough material, so you get the color and clarity you would with a brilliant diamond.

Most importantly, the smaller, independent designers who are Indian, American or European are departing from the traditional pieces and are instead incorporating aspects of classic Indian designs such as various motifs, gemstones and high-karat gold, and are

creating their own interpretations for the modern woman.

This is exciting, as it's allowing the luxury market to consider new diamonds to cater to what women are asking for: something different. Women have their basic diamond jewelry wardrobe, and now want other pieces that are innovative, interesting and original—jewelry that makes a statement and says something about who they are. I think that this is just the beginning of a resurgence that will be around for a long time to come.

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This vintage enameled "Jigha" includes a table-cut diamond, ruby petals and an emerald drop. Auctioned by Christie's London in 1997.