

RICH COLOR, FRESH DESIGN

Fine jewelry designers showed pieces that would fit well into any guild store. Making news was a change in dates and location for the West Springfield wholesale show

by Hedda T. Schupak,
fashion editor

Rich gold and lush colored gemstones were the top fine jewelry design trends at the recent Buyers Market of American Crafts and the American Craft Enterprises show. Exhibitors at the Buyers Market, held Feb. 19-22 in Philadelphia, said traffic was a little light, but all reported fairly brisk sales. First-day reports from the ACE show, held Feb. 22-26 in Baltimore, were similar.

The jewelry showed a marked move away from the gem-tongue/semi-circle design motifs which dominated the summer craft shows. While craft-fair jewelry often targets the one-of-a-kind gallery-jeweler market, designers this winter offered more products which would fit comfortably in the merchandise mix of any guild-type jewelry store.

Gold was the metal of choice among fine jewelry designers. Treatments included anticlastic raising, experiments with different finishes and mixed textures and karatages.

Sterling silver, vermeil and sterling with gold applied all remained popular. Designs and prices ranged from the low-end boutique market to high-end sterling mixed with high-karat gold and/or gemstones and pearls.

Designers also played with a rainbow of gem color. Tourmaline, especially fine specimens of paraiba, was one favorite; boulder opal was

another. The use of pearls as a design element remained strong.

One trend to note: Nearly every fine jewelry designer offered some kind of wedding ring. Either marriage is very much en vogue or people have simply grown tired of the standard wedding band.

New dates:

American Craft Enterprises announced it will move the wholesale-only segment of its summer craft fair from West Springfield, Mass., to Columbus, Ohio, in 1994, with dates in early rather than late June. Fine jewelry exhibitors weren't happy because the new dates conflict with JCK's Jewelry '94 show in Las Vegas.

"I think this was done completely without thought," said Jonathon Stopper of Simply Jonathon's. "There are already too many shows, and lots of people here exhibit in more than one show." He added that much of the craft show traffic is regional, citing mostly drive-in traffic at West Springfield.



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Fine jewelry exhibitors met during the Baltimore show, and designer Douglas Zaruba said the general consensus was to exhibit at JCK's Jewelry '94. "That means we do JCK, JA [Jewelers of America], Boston [Buyers Market of American Crafts] and those who wish would do the retail days at Springfield."

Designer Eric Russell felt the decision was made without much feedback from exhibitors. He said ACE told exhibitors they'd taken a poll on moving the show, but declined repeated requests to see the results. "It's a shame, but

I'm just going to lose touch with a whole group of people," said Russell. "The New England market is educated, and is used to selling craft merchandise."

JoAnn Brown, director of ACE Marketing, said she has pages of comments, dating from as far back as 1988, in which both craftspeople and buyers say, "Move!" It's possible, she said, that some specific jewelers were not consulted, but it was never any secret that ACE has been

looking for a new location for years. Columbus offers a good convention facility, and it's not easy to get dates there.

"We wanted to establish a professional, credible summer market in a facility which resembles our winter market," she said. The West Springfield facility has a county fair atmosphere, not all the buildings are equal, and some house animals at other times.

So why keep the retail segment of the fair there? Brown said the very factors that turn off wholesale buyers appeal to the public. "We get a lot of visitors from New York and New Jersey," she said, "and they like the wide open spaces, the county fair atmosphere and the expanse of free parking."

"We really are trying to work this [conflict for jewelers] out," she added. "Unfortunately, it's a big world and you can't schedule anything, anywhere, in any month and not conflict with someone."

The conflict actually would affect only about 20 exhibitors, Brown said, and while she is concerned about accommodating them, she does have more than 1,000 other craftspeople to consider. She noted that jewelers who choose to exhibit in Las Vegas instead of Columbus will still be more than welcome to participate in any other ACE show. ■



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MARK WINTER CRAFT SHOWS



1. Gold, onyx, opal and diamond brooch is by Rob Greene, Plainfield, Vt.

2. Textured gold and diamond wedding bands are by Carol Ackerman, Avon, Conn.

3. Brooches in 14k and 18k gold with diamonds, Australian boulder opal, garnet and pearl are hammer forged and hand crafted by Ben Dyer, Hillsborough, N.C.

4. Sterling, amethyst and pearl earrings are by K. Kathryn Pearce for Kallima Jewelry, Lancaster, Pa.

5. Hollow formed earrings and brooch with cultured pearls come in 18k, vermeil or sterling. By Andrea Carnahan, Louisville, Ky.

6. 14k yellow gold stack rings with diamond accents are available in a variety of gemstones. Shown here with garnet and citrine. By Lauren S. Schott, Baltimore, Md.



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PROMOTE GOLD FOR BIGGER PROFITS

Although few jewelers promote gold as a separate jewelry category, it still provides higher gross margin and turnover than other types of jewelry. Think how well it would do with a bigger push!

by Hedda T. Schupak, fashion editor

Karat gold jewelry is a primary product in most jewelry stores. But apart from endless percent-off advertising, there's a gaping hole where good gold promotions should be.

It doesn't have to be that way. Gold responds very well to promotion, says Christine Yorke, merchandise manager of the World Gold Council. Why, then, do so few jewelers focus on promoting it? Does gold sell itself?

In fact, basic gold (chain, hoop earrings, etc.) does sell itself, say

jewelers. "People pretty much know what gold chain is and whether they want one," says Mary Blumenthal of Corinne Jewelers, Toms River, N.J.

Beyond the basics, however, is another story. Jewelers interviewed for this story say they benefit from specialized display, promotion and merchandising of designer, custom and other non-basic gold jewelry.

Overall, these jewelers generally don't promote gold jewelry as a category. "We advertise the

Gold is democratic, says Calnon, meaning good-quality pieces are available in a wide range of prices. The average retail price for gold jewelry is \$88, says WGC. "It's definitely a lower price point than other jewelry categories," says Calnon. "But the secretary who buys \$19 gold earrings feels just as good about her purchase as the executive who buys a \$3,000 bracelet."

And once a woman buys a piece of fine jewelry, she will feel more comfortable at higher price points for future sales.

Another factor to consider is shopping style. WGC's Christine Yorke says women are used to shopping in a certain manner – namely browsing – and many jewelers don't accommodate this shopping style. "Jewelers need to re-create the shopping experience that most women are comfortable with," she says. "A woman buying a suit is used to going to the rack, looking through the selection and seeing at a glance what is available in her style, size, color and price. A lot of jewelers are against visible pricing, but most women want to know what they're dealing with up front."

Putting one or two pieces in the showcase and keeping the rest in the vault is another mistake, says Yorke. Women don't want to waste a salesperson's time asking to see other pieces if they're not sure they'll buy, she says, and they're afraid they'll feel pressured by taking the salesperson's time.

"I don't think you can 'sell' a piece of jewelry to a woman any more than you can sell a piece of clothing to her," says Yorke. "All you can do is validate the decision she's already made to buy." If you "sell" a woman something she hasn't already sold herself on, adds Yorke, chances are better than average the item will come back.

That brings up another factor: the return. In a department store, a woman can buy a suit, take it home, decide it just doesn't work and feel perfectly comfortable bringing it back, knowing the return will be accepted without question or comment. A jeweler can use a liberal return policy as a valuable selling tool; women who are unsure about the piece or the price are more likely to buy if they know they can bring it back with no hassle and no guilt.

Additionally, encouraging a woman to take a piece home to try with her wardrobe often results in a sale. It helps her to develop a sense of ownership and seeing how the piece works with different outfits increases its value to her. ■

"Wood Poppy" brooch is 18k hand-formed and hand-fabricated. Suggested retail, \$600. Andrea Carnahan, Louisville, Ky.

For more photos of gold jewelry, see page 154.



THE SHAPE OF GOLD TO COME

It all started with *Book of Trends of Summer '83: Gold and Fashion*, published by Intergold to stimulate gold jewelry designs inspired by socioeconomic climate rather than traditional sources. Since then, Intergold and its successor – the World Gold Council – have produced a series of books that have become recognized internationally as the main instrument for predicting gold jewelry trends.

In the 10 years since the first book was published, external indicators of style and design trends have advanced from apparel to include art, design and furnishings. In addition, sociocultural research was introduced to define the gold-jewelry customer and her desires, as well as changes in consumer attitudes early in their development (such as concern with nature and the environment).

The 1994-'95 edition – which will be available later this year – will focus on three fundamental trends:

- Essential jewelry will have simple but regulated design, classic and traditional composition. Satin finishes or worked surfaces will contrast with sharp geometric shapes with well-defined edges. Lines may be sinuous and curved, delicately soft and convex, but they will be clear and clean. If the material is highly polished, there will be more highlights and greater volume to en-

sure that line remains the main feature. Gemstones, if used, will be discreet accents.

The balance between form and function must transmit intimacy, sensitivity and emotion, and the piece will likely be bought for sentiment rather than intrinsic value. A comparable clothing designer is Giorgio Armani, known for clean, uncluttered lines and functionality.

- Eclectic jewelry will arouse attention, create surprise and stir emotions. A mix of daring and avant-garde designs will draw inspiration from unusual and artistic places, abandoning conformist styles and expressing individuality.

A fashion designer of similar notion is Issey Miyake.

- Mediterranean jewelry will be characterized by a desire to escape, whether it's to exotic places or a world of dreams. Inspired by the rich craftwork of Mediterranean countries, the shapes will be simple or soft and delicate, with surfaces bearing patterns or graphics of such ancient symbols as the olive and the vine, the sky and stars, fish, birds, fruit, seeds, hearts and flowers. They may be embellished with gold wire, perhaps reminiscent of ancient carpets.

Picture richly colored costumes, with loose flowing sundresses and boleros and full skirts revealing shorts underneath, such as the designs of Krizia.