

For some, Bollywood jewelry is a golden ticket

BY LORRAINE DEPASQUE

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MUMBAI, INDIA—Hooray for Bollywood—and all the new jewelry evoking the colors, styles and techniques of old world India.

Despite gold's steadily rising prices, a growing number of consumers are gravitating toward modern interpretations of the ancient gold jewelry that originated in the land of maharajas and mogul jewels.

Even before *Slumdog Millionaire* won eight Academy Awards this year, a swirl of social, cultural, financial and fashion trends had already come together to create a passage to India for jewelry design.

"There are many reasons, not the least among them is the fact that India is an emerging nation with a growing middle class and a rich and colorful culture," says Ellen Sideri, founder and chief executive officer of trend forecasting firm ESP Trendlab in New York. "And the movie that just won an Oscar brings more interest to that whole culture—which includes their ancient jewelry."

Ancient Indian jewels are known for a combination of design elements: Often handcrafted, the metal is warm, rich yellow gold, leading most modern-day designers to choose 22- or 24-karat, and the gemstones used are either vivid, Indian sari-inspired hues or white rose-cut diamonds. Design motifs include paisleys, snakes, scrolls and the om symbol.

Celebrities such as Angelina Jolie and Halle Berry are among the rising number

of starlets photographed wearing Indian-inspired jewelry.

Meanwhile, on Main Street, where there is growing interest in yoga, meditation and spiritual symbol jewelry, discerning consumers are seeking handcrafted as well as higher-karat gold jewelry that is perceived as retaining its value. The recession has also prompted shoppers to seek out more understated jewelry, especially with less expensive rose-cut diamonds.

MODERN MEETS ANCIENT

Still, it's important to note that the Indian-inspired jewelry has been intentionally made distinct from traditional Indian jewelry to appeal to the U.S. market.

Pratima Sethi, designer of San Francisco-based Sethi Couture (formerly Manak Couture), and of Indian heritage herself, says traditional Indian jewelry is often made of 22-karat gold with gemstones of multiple colors within one piece.

But, in February, when Sethi premiered her new "Bollywood Collection" at a celebrity suite at the Oscars—yes, to tie in with and salute *Slumdog*—the dozen-plus items were presented in 18-karat gold—a softer hue that Sethi thinks has more appeal to American consumers. Each piece was purposefully accented with either a single gem or enamel color.

"I think with cleaner lines and less color, the eye is drawn to the whole piece," Sethi says.

Additionally, she uses an assortment of rose-cut diamonds. At the Oscars, *Slumdog* co-director Loveleen Tandan wore Sethi's Bollywood Collection rose-cut diamond earrings and two large green enamel bangles with rose cuts.

Notably, Sethi designed her Bollywood Collection, which draws on the glamour of Hollywood and Indian cinema as well as the vibrant colors of old Bombay, long before *Slumdog* was ever released, aiming it at her more sophisticated clients.

"This is for someone who is open to trying new things and who is comfortable with experimentation in clothing and jewelry," she says.

Jonathan Landsberg, co-owner of



Earrings in 24-karat gold with rose-cut rubies from Gurhan's "Aurora Collection;" suggested retail price is \$8,700. (646) 230-1122 or Gurhan.com

Green enamel and rose-cut diamond bangles in 18-karat gold from Sethi Couture's "Bollywood Collection;" suggested retail price is \$17,000 each. (415) 255-4768 or SethiCouture.com



EV Jewelry Design's serpent ring in 14-karat gold with two carats of rubies from the "Kali Ma Collection;" suggested retail price is \$1,165. (212) 869-1010 or EVJewelryDesign.com

Also helping to spike interest among U.S. consumers in ancient Indian jewelry style is the Internet.

Elias Vayas of EV Jewelry Design in New York City makes jewelry featuring typical Indian themes, from snakes and scrolls to the om and Indian goddesses.

Emeralds and rubies abound in his flagship collection, "Kali Ma" (named for the Hindu goddess).

"Ten years ago, a lot of people didn't even know what the om sign was, but today, many in mainstream America do," Vayas says. "Thousands of people attend yoga and meditation conferences all across the country."

Three years ago, his own yoga and meditation practices motivated Greek-born Vayas to develop a line of one-of-a-kind Indian-inspired gemstone jewelry in 22-karat, 18-karat and 14-karat gold, and now those pieces may be right on target.

"Emeralds, rubies and also blue sapphires have been underplayed for too long, but for spring and fall 2010, the colors get very rich," says trend forecaster Sideri. "So these three gemstones are perfect and you'll see more of them."

Sideri also notes that Indian jewelry, by its nature, is about collectibles.

"So all of the modern Bollywood-style jewelry is a new way to afford and wear luxury because consumers can mix and layer in all the different hues of the gems and the golds as well as the different symbols," Sideri says. ♦



Lorraine DePasque is a freelance writer who specializes in fine jewelry and gems.

The basics of Bollywood style

Certain characteristics usually define Bollywood jewelry. Among the most prominent:

- » Warm, high-toned yellow gold, especially in 22- or 24-karat
- » Rose-cut white diamonds
- » Primary color gems, with ruby, emerald and blue sapphire as most important
- » Bright-hued enamels, like vibrant reds, greens, blues, purples, oranges and yellows
- » Motifs such as paisleys, snakes, scrolls and the om symbol
- » Openwork, particularly filigree
- » Craftsman-like techniques and textured metals



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