

## Silver's back—and so is its marketing apparatus

By Lorraine DePasque

**NEW YORK**—For 2009, silver is set to shine—and while the comparatively high prices of gold and platinum have given it a boost, the white metal's heat goes beyond dollars.

A new Silver Marketing Initiative (SMI), set to officially kick off on Dec. 3 with a trade and consumer media launch event in New York City, has fueled much of the optimism. Not since 2001 has there been a structured marketing effort in place for sterling silver jewelry, says Michael DiRienzo, executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based Silver Institute.

"We had been marketing sterling silver jewelry to the public between 1988 through 2001 under a division, Silver Trust International," DiRienzo says. "Then, for many reasons, it was disbanded. But now, we're restarting those marketing efforts and taking a leadership role in promoting silver jewelry in the hope of achieving greater market penetration and silver demand."

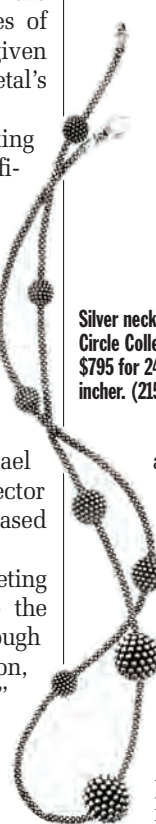
Key components of that strategy are the creation of a new silver jewelry consumer Web site, SavorSilver.com, along with a new logo for the metal.

"This is not a quality mark but, instead, more a mark to instantly distinguish sterling silver," says Michael Barlerin, president of New York-based Michael Barlerin Associates, the consultant organization for the initiative's development



The new silver logo for the Silver Marketing Initiative of The Silver Institute.

Silver necklace from Lagos' "Columbus Circle Collection;" suggested retail price is \$795 for 24-inch version or \$995 for 32-inch. (215) 925-1693 or www.lagos.com



and rollout. "The words themselves, Savor Silver, are a brand communication line that will be used not only as the Web site name but also in print and online media for the campaign."

Barlerin's lengthy jewelry resumé includes 15 years at the World Gold Council, where he was chief executive officer for the Americas.

That experience was instrumental in choosing the initial 10 designers to be featured on the forthcoming consumer Web site, which, synergistically, will include links to the respective designers' individual sites. SavorSilver.com will not itself include e-commerce for its debut, but consumers who click on the designers' individual Web sites can either buy directly or find a retailer who sells the brand.

The first phase of designers on the site, 10 in all, is a mix of established names and emerging jewelry artists. They are: Elle, Lagos, Leslie Greene, Paz Collective, Robert Lee Morris, Robin Rotenier, Scott Kay, Slane & Slane, Thistle & Bee and Zina.

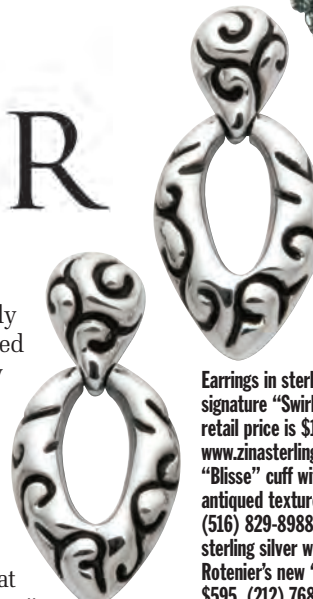
Steve Lagos, who launched Philadelphia design company Lagos

in 1977, is certainly one of the established names. In the early 1980s, Lagos and about a half-dozen others became innovators in designer sterling silver jewelry, creating a category that some now call "bridge." Despite his historical success in silver and his own effective Web site, Lagos joined the Savor Silver site as well.

"People have been pounding the gold and platinum drums for years, so it's high time to pound the drum for silver," he says. "Remember, this is a precious metal—it's not copper. We sell silver to some of the wealthiest people in the country. So retailers have to realize that if they don't carry high-quality sterling silver jewelry—whether we're in difficult economic times or not—their customer will go elsewhere to buy good silver."

And exactly who is buying? "Obviously, the silver on the new site will appeal to younger, under 40, customers, but mainly because they're the ones more apt to go online to buy their jewelry," says Andrew Goldstein, owner and vice president of Beverly Hills, Calif.-based Zina, specialists in silver for 25 years. The Zina pieces that appear on SavorSilver.com will retail between \$80 and \$500, and consumers will be able to buy directly from the designer's site, ZinaBeverlyHills.com.

For Great Neck, N.Y.-based designer Leslie Greene, \$700 is



Earrings in sterling silver from Zina's signature "Swirl Collection;" suggested retail price is \$120. (800) 336-3822 or www.zinasterling.com. Leslie Greene's "Blisse" cuff with 0.40 carats of diamonds and antiqued texture; suggested retail price is \$1,895. (516) 829-8988 or www.lesliegreene.com. Ring in sterling silver with round diamonds on stems from Robin Rotenier's new "Petale Collection;" suggested retail price is \$595. (212) 768-1117 or www.rotenier.com



about the average retail price of a sterling silver piece, while the 18-karat gold jewelry that she is known for averages about \$2,800. Like Goldstein, Greene believes that her silver appeals more to a younger customer than does her classic 18-karat collection. That said, Greene admittedly does make some edgier designs in silver, which will usually appeal to a younger audience. So it seems the consumer is younger and most likely, less conservative.

Which begs the question: Once the consumer site is up and running and the rest of the initiative is underway, will more conservative areas of the country begin to increase their silver inventory? Greene says they already have.

"Our retailers know their customers and they are able to explain silver's value to them," she says.

"So much of silver's potential is about value," says New York City-based designer Robin Rotenier, whose fashion-forward design company was founded in 1993. Rotenier sees the site as achieving three goals: underscoring to consumers that silver (like gold, platinum and palladium) is one of the noble metals;

educating customers about the properties specific to silver and, thus, generally erasing a number of concerns and misconceptions; and encouraging other jewelry designers to believe in silver and push the creative envelope, perhaps making more one-of-a-kind and limited-edition pieces.

Even if more designers don't do one-offs in silver, informal polling shows that economic conditions will prompt many more—especially silver newcomers who usually choose high-karat metals (18-karat and above) as their medium—to use winter shows to premiere collections in sterling.

Proposals for more qualitative trade research are, in fact, being reviewed and discussed as part of "phase two" of the SMI, Barlerin says. At this time, The Silver Institute is also considering ideas on industry-directed advertorials in selected trade media as well as consumer co-op advertising programs for the second quarter of 2009. Sometime before that, however, as the final step in SMI's "phase one," it will launch a quarterly industry-focused electronic newsletter, Barlerin says. ♦

—E-mail: ldepasque@optonline.net

### Top trends in designer silver

- Oxidized and blackened finishes
- Extra-wide cuffs
- Diamond-accented anything
- Oversized pendants on leather or silk cords
- Feminine feeling overall, in themes and ornamentation