



Mattioli "Siriana Collection" pendant in 18-karat gold with black onyx and 2.85 carats of "icy diamonds;" suggested retail price is \$5,700. (914) 235-6262 or MattioliGioielli.it



Roberto Coin bangle and ring in 18-karat gold, ebony wood and cognac diamonds from the "Capri Plus Collection;" suggested retail price is \$6,800 for bangle, \$2,600 for ring. (800) 853-5958 or RobertoCoin.com



Necklace in 18-karat rose gold with amethyst from Calgaro's "Perfect Collection;" suggested retail price is \$2,300. (305) 673-6190 or Calgaro.it

branded or non-branded, our customer wants quality and value."

PRICE POINT-CENTRIC DESIGNS

For many U.S. luxury retailers, affordability counts too. Udell says everyday Italian pieces—such as Roberto Coin's small hammered gold collection, and its lightweight, easy-to-wear "Chic & Shine Collection"—sell well for London Jewelers.

At the Vicenza and Milan shows, and at BaselWorld, many designers addressed affordability head-on by incorporating less expensive materials such as wood, ceramic and titanium, or using more affordable gemstones and diamonds.

In Basel, Roberto Coin added 18-karat gold pieces mixing ebony wood and cognac diamonds to its "Capri Plus Collection," providing a large fashion look for less.

Similarly, U.S. newcomer Fabio Salini of Rome paired titanium with sapphire, and Brescia, Italy-based Jarretiere used ceramic for its signature gold and diamond stretch bracelets and rings.

Meanwhile, fashion-forward Mattioli reduced price points by using "icy diamonds" in several collections. The 18-karat gold "Siriana" pendant with black onyx and 2.85 carats of icy diamonds, for example, retails at \$5,700, compared to about \$9,000 for a piece with brilliant diamonds, says Mattioli USA Director Dan Bogue.

At Vicenza, Calgaro unveiled "The Perfect Collection," featuring lighter-weight pieces that are hollow, but not electroformed, with diamond accents set through innovative technology.

The idea of using less gold, without skimping on style, will be the Italian Trade Commission's (ITC) focus when it launches a holiday season promotional partnership with a major—and as yet undisclosed—U.S. jewelry chain, which will partner with four important Italian gold jewelry districts in the Piedmont, Veneto, Tuscany and Marche regions as part of efforts to build demand and offer new brands, says Paola Bellusci, ITC's Los Angeles-based trade commissioner.

The ITC is also working to bring Hollywood into its Made in Italy efforts.

"Our office will continue the promotional plan started early this year aimed at product placement, with the goal of getting Italian products—jewelry as well as fashion and accessories—onto celebrities in movies and television," Bellusci says.



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Exports down, but 'Made in Italy' label still coveted

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MILAN, ITALY—"Made in Italy" has a certain cachet in the jewelry industry, thanks to Italy's long-standing reputation for high quality workmanship, beautiful design and product integrity.

But in recent years, given the dollar's weakness against the euro, fewer U.S. retailers have been attending Italian jewelry fairs, with some turning instead to emerging nations that offer high-volume exports of lower-priced jewelry.

The sharp kick of the recession has also left American jewelers walking away from the boot-shaped nation's exports: Italian exports for 2008 fell 8.3 percent overall, with U.S. exports sinking 30 percent, according to statistics presented at BaselWorld from the Intesa Sanpaolo Study Service. The United States is now third behind the United Arab Emirates and Switzerland, respectively, in terms of Italian gold jewelry exports.

Nevertheless, leading U.S. luxury retailers say once a financial recovery begins, they'll resume buying more Italian jewelry—especially high-end brands.

"Italy has notoriety for some of the world's finest luxury products," says Pam Danziger, founder and president of Stevens, Pa.-based Unity Marketing, which monitors affluent consumer spending behavior through quarterly surveys. One such survey, which was conducted before the recession and included 1,200 affluent consumers with annual household incomes of

\$100,000-plus, showed that U.S. consumers rank Italy number two behind the United States as "the country associated with better-quality goods." France was third, followed by Germany and England.

"Made in Italy adds luster to a product and, among many other things, our survey found that luxury consumers do show definite preference for luxury goods manufactured in certain countries," Danziger says.

RETAILERS 'RATE' ITALIAN

Consumer appreciation of Italian products is precisely part of its appeal in jewelry, says Candy Udell, president of London Jewelers, an upscale, eight-store jewelry chain based in Long Island, N.Y.

"For our customers, Made in Italy stands for quality," she says. "It's that simple. Italian design and workmanship is unparalleled."

Unity Marketing's study found that, compared to younger consumers, those in the 45-to-70 age group held much more definitive opinions on which countries produce better-quality merchandise.

But Udell says London Jewelers' younger clients grasp the exquisite design and craftsmanship of Italian pieces.

"They wear Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci and other Italian clothing and accessory brands, and so they understand that the same quality transcends to jewelry," she says.

At upscale Leonardo Jewelers, with stores in Red Bank and Elizabeth, N.J., the average customer is over 30, but sophisticated and aspirational customers tune into the Made in Italy label, regardless of

age, says co-owner Lourdes Zeik-Chivi. She admits that the poor exchange rate, in particular, has prompted the family-owned business to decrease its Italian purchases by about 40 percent since 2006.

"But, in the meantime, we also aren't breaking down and buying the cheaper kinds of pieces the Italians make from emerging nations either—because their quality isn't the same as Italian quality," she says. "When I went to Milan in February for the About J show, it actually reinforced in me that there are no better designers than the Italians. So, when things go back to normal and we can get their jewelry at a better price, we will buy more Italian again."

Given the economic downturn, Zeik-Chivi is looking at Italian sterling silver lines for the first time and says the About J silver designs in Milan equaled Italy's gold designs in quality and edginess.

John Green, owner of Lux Bond & Green in West Hartford, Conn., says he's already buying Italian silver for his eight luxury stores across New England.

"Like the gold and gold and diamonds, I buy Italian silver because of the design and quality," says Green, who adds that he has been buying less product overall, including Italian, because of the recession.

Unlike many high-end American retailers who have been buying much of their generic product from emerging nations since the euro was introduced, Green still offers his affluent clientele non-branded and branded Italian jewelry in gold or silver.

"To me, jewelry design still begins in Italy," Green says. "It's the finest quality. And whether it's

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