

BY LORRAINE DEPASQUE

# ITALY

## STRIVING FOR IMPERFECTION

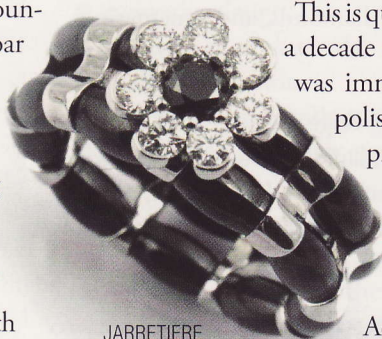
HIGH-FASHION JEWELRY MANUFACTURERS FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN ARE ESCHEWING THE LOOK OF PERFECT IN FAVOR OF FLAWED—OR, MORE ACCURATELY, THE APPEARANCE OF NONINDUSTRIAL HANDCRAFTSMANSHIP.

**F**OR CENTURIES, ITALY HAS BUILT its enviable culture on flawless workmanship; however, at the Vicenzaoro First show this January, imperfect-looking pieces were the strongest trend among the country's fine jewelry makers—bar none. Reacting to a shift toward mass global markets, the Italian jewelry community seems to be challenging homogeneity by harkening back the styles of the Arts and Crafts movement (of the late 19th and early 20th centuries). Artisans showed off handcrafted looks, utilizing:

- organic and odd shapes
- varied textures (hammered, scratched, brushed, and scribbled)
- unusual materials (ceramic, wood, rubber, and titanium)

- raw, rough, and irregularly-cut gems (from diamonds to semiprecious)
- bent and uneven bezels around stones (particularly diamonds)
- far-from-uniform links

This is quite a departure from the styles of a decade ago, when Italian jewelry design was immediately identifiable by highly polished and unblemished surfaces, precise bombe curves, exacting matched links, and perceptibly flawless colored gems.



JARRETIERE

### Arts and Crafts

According to Paola De Luca, co-founder and creative director of **TJF**, an international forecasting firm based in Arezzo, "Italy is now experiencing a recovery in artisanship, with the resurrection of techniques that were heading toward extinction. We are seeing the blossoming of artisanal laboratories. Ancient manufacturing techniques are being looked at to bring the past and the present together. Found materials are being united with new technologies. There is a return to the importance of beauty found in precious materials, handcrafting, careful finishes, and attention to detail."

One of Italy's most directional houses, whose work has the clear markings of this movement, is Milan-based **Calgato**. At Vicenzaoro First, the brand (which exhibited in the exclusive B-One pavilion alongside Italy's major players) premiered a new lightweight gold—not electroforming—that appears heavy and, most



TALENTO

NANIS





LA NOUVELLE BAGUE



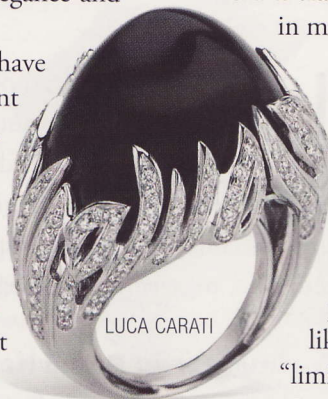
MARCO BICEGO



ROBERTO COIN

importantly, allows diamonds to be bezel-set. The high-fashion manufacturer also unveiled its ironically named *Perfect* collection: an 18K gold line with a completely handmade look that features unusual cuts of semiprecious gems and hammered-look finishes. All of this is an homage to what Calgaro calls “the perfect flaw—a sublime sign of true elegance and natural spontaneity.”

Indeed, natural-looking gems have carved out an important segment for Italy’s big-name brands. Torino-based **Mattioli** has made “milky diamonds” the centerpiece of one of its current collections, *Siriana*. Likewise, Vicenza’s **Roberto Coin** has a new *Capri Plus* collection that spotlights pastel-shaded cabochons in unorthodox shapes.



LUCA CARATI

Given the current 1970s revival on the haute couture runways, the accessories of the era have become important jewelry statements. In modern interpretations, the oval is an ever-present shape. Resembling an egg, the simple Arts & Crafts oblong has unequivocally eclipsed the circle as the “it.” In the context of today’s design, however, the oval is oftentimes awry. It seems to sway and slant in its uneven form—even though, in actuality, it doesn’t.

### Back to Black

In contrast to the far-from-safe design theme, the key color trend at Vicenzaoro First was anything but daring. Despite lots of talk about fun, kaleidoscopic palettes, black held strong as the No. 1 choice. Either the dark hue is an analogous reflection of the public sentiment about the economy or it simply seems like a safe selection.

While black diamonds and

black sapphires have been a large part of the Italian jewelry scene for years, black onyx has just returned in a big way. This member of the chalcedony family did, in fact, gain favor on both sides of the Atlantic from the mid-19th century on, making it a gem favorite during the Arts and Crafts era. Black ebony, too, is showing up in more collections.

### Being Bespoke

Of course, a few of Italy’s prestigious jewelry houses are still reputed for their more classic styles, such as Valenza’s **Picchiotti**, for example. Even so, they are using words like “bespoke,” “one-of-a-kind,” and “limited edition” with greater frequency. Look for limited edition collections with signed and numbered pieces from some of the world’s great carvers.

De Luca predicts that in 2010, “Bespoke jewelry will be a key trend. Luckily, it allows designers to use a wide range of materials—from baroque South Sea pearls to unusual colored gemstones; from titanium to colored golds—thereby empowering creativity and boldness. Serious connoisseurs will seek out that which is different by design.”



CALGARO