

# COOUTURE<sup>®</sup>

INTERNATIONAL JEWELER



Technology meets art

## Metallic Muse

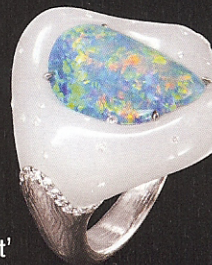
After years of scorning titanium, jewelers are finally waking up to its new, more luxurious image, having grasped what the watch industry discovered some time ago: Titanium is strong, durable, corrosion-resistant and lightweight—all characteristics that have made the metal attractive to rocket scientists and prosthetic manufacturers. Until recently, however, the noble metal was seen as little more than a cheap alternative for men's wedding bands, the bulk of them machined in China and sold online.

The attention of a few artists was all that was needed to change that. Chief among them: a spectacular Hong Kong-based gem carver named Wallace Chan and a talented Belgian designer, Francis Mertens, both of whom are experimenting with the naturally gray metal, creating jewels that are impossible to produce in gold or platinum, not only because titanium's feather weight allows them to design large-scale gem sculptures but also because the metal can be anodized into a rainbow of iridescent hues, from bronze to lavender.

Along with fellow jewelry-artists such as Michelle Ong of Hong Kong's Carnet, Fabio Salini in Rome, Suzanne Syz in Geneva and Edmond Chin of Hong Kong's Etcetera, these light metal pioneers are helping to bring the jewelry industry into the 21st century. The Italians have also gotten behind the metal, proof that even for gold jewelry aficionados, the blend of technology and art made possible by titanium opens up a tantalizing universe of design possibilities.

**Andreoli pin** Named after the Titans of Greek mythology, titanium is virtually indestructible—another reason it's eluded the industry until now. "We studied it for a long time, but we had a lot of difficulties," admits Jack Hadjibay of Andreoli, a Valenza-based jeweler that recently introduced a few select pieces set in titanium, including this teal-colored, diamond-set pin.

**Wallace Chan ring** Captured by titanium's lightness and kaleidoscopic nature, Chan first experimented with the metal in 2000. "With sophisticated casting processes, an alchemist's feel for the metal and its 'temperament' plus ancient craftsmanship," he's overcome the technical challenges associated with titanium to produce mesmerizing jewels like this Ocean Dream opal ring.



**Fabio Salini earrings** "When I discovered titanium could be colored," says Rome-based Salini, "I decided to do something more in my style: very thin, very delicate, very sophisticated." Something a lot like these pink sapphire earrings, perhaps?

**Francis Mertens earrings** About five years ago, spurred by conversations with university professors, heart surgeons and rocket scientists, Mertens began a process of trial and error that has since resulted in a titanium collection so opulent that's it's won over the discerning buyers at New York's temple of cool, Bergdorf Goodman.

