



JEWELLERY NEWS ASIA



The Road to

Luxury

Amidst spiralling gold and oil prices and a sluggish US market that cast clouds over the jewellery industry, the high-end jewellery segment appears to thrive. While it is enviable to be in such a position, it takes more than just offering a 5-carat diamond to the privileged few to succeed. Luxury jewellers who've made it to the top discuss their game plan with Jessica Pang.



From top left: Titanium cuffs set with 69 carats of diamonds and 15.8 carats of tanzanite by Francis Merlens; jewellery in white gold set with Cento diamonds by Roberto Coin; and necklace set with jadeite, diamonds, rubies and pearls by Fabio Solini

"Exclusivity is the big added-value to my creations"

Mr Mertens is not alone in his pursuit of something different. In Rome, jewellery designer Fabio Salini realised that working for big names including Cartier and Bulgari did give him invaluable experiences. However, he still found himself starting his own brand and creating something unique. "Once you



Queen Rania of Jordan wearing earrings in white gold set with diamonds, rock crystal and fancy pear-shaped sapphires by Fabio Salini; a white gold rock-crystal bracelet with inlaid blue sapphires and white pearls; and silk necklace embroidered with diamonds and ruby beads with pendant in satin-finished rock crystal, diamonds and 8-carat cabochon cut ruby

make multiples of a product, you become an industry. My jewellery is one of a kind. It is for a very exclusive clientele. Exclusivity is a big value-added to my production," Mr Salini told JNA.

Borrowing tailoring techniques such as embroidery and using uncommon materials such as silicon leather, Mr Salini's jewellery has won the hearts of very sophisticated customers, among them Queen Rania of Jordan, who has worn the artist's jewellery in both public and private occasions.

The confident Mr Salini is prepared for an even brighter future for his business as he set his eyes on the world map. Apart from holding trunk shows in selected department stores in the US, the Italian jeweller exhibited for the first time in About J, a high-end jewellery fair in Milan organised by Fiera Di Vicenza which was launched in March this year. Mr Salini described the results of the fair as satisfactory. "It is a good show because it brings together many high-end brand. If I have a chance I don't mind going to the Far East... I will definitely expand my business," he said.

However, no matter how big his business becomes, one can be assured that his creations will remain limited in numbers, as Mr Salini believes that exclusivity is the right direction for his business. "In the last ten years there was a big moment of luxury, and now we have a whole lot of luxury goods. But what exactly is luxury? You find the same expensive things offered by big brands in Hong Kong, Tokyo, Moscow, South Africa, the United States... all over the world. I believe there is a growing group of people who are looking for unusual and hard-to-find products. To me, luxury is something that is hard to find.

It matches with my strategy, and I think it will be more convenient for me to employ this strategy in the future," Mr Salini said.



Left: "Telalo" necklace made of rock crystals and sapphires in different shades by Italian jewellery designer Fabio Salini

Below: Paraíba tourmaline and bi-colour tourmaline from Fayas Jewellery



It does appear that those who manage to stay afloat are those that have the big stones the market wants. Fayas Jewellery, which saw good business last year, said orders for multi-colour tourmaline from a new source in Africa are helping it stay afloat. "Demand is rising for stones as big as 20 to 80 carats from Germany, Hong Kong and the Middle East, where jewellery manufacturers are using more big stones for their jewellery," said M Arif, director of the company, who added that having good contacts and good sources is vital in finding stones of such sizes.

other hand, saw a 10- to 12-percent increase," he said.

For companies that supply mainly medium-quality gemstones, offering high-end goods seems to be the only way out. Among the companies that adopted such a strategy is Selective Gem House, which saw its sales increase by a significant 50 percent when it decided to supply only high-quality stones last year. Goods in the company's product range include Paraíba tourmaline and rubellite in top quality and sizes as big as 10 carats.

"It is very hard to source rough, and when we do find it we pay high prices. It seems to be no problem for buyers to absorb such high prices. They are not concerned about the prices; they care only about the quality. There is a lot of demand but very little supply," commented Mr Mujeebu, sales and purchase manager of Selective Gem House. He added that this shortage has driven up prices of polished tanzanite, which the company supplies.

Mr Tambi of Emerald Mines had a similar observation. "Prices of rubies are spiralling as a result of the rough shortage. They have increased by 25 percent in a year. Sapphires, on the