

Accessories/Legwear Report

# Jewelers Sparkle at Milan's About J Show

By Alessandra Ileri

**MILAN** — About J, the new upscale jewelry fair that launched here last week, earned positive marks from exhibitors, who praised the timing and the location's intimacy and exclusivity. About J's ambitious goal is to compete with Baselworld, the international Swiss watch and jewelry fair that attracts hordes of buyers from all over.

The three-day exhibition ended on Tuesday and was organized by Fiera di Vicenza, the same organizers of the Vicenzaoro jewelry fairs, to bring premium jewelers under one roof.

Seventy select jewelry firms got the green light to show at About J, which was attended by equally select buyers representing 370 stores, Saks Fifth Avenue, Wynn Resorts Las Vegas and Silverhorn Inc. from Santa Barbara, Calif., were among the U.S. attendees.

"Europe lacked an elitist event dedicated to high-end jewelers and we feel that About J fills that void. We want to maintain this exclusive format," said Lisa Orlandi, project manager for the show.

Paola De Micheli, sales manager at Staurino Fratelli, echoed that view. "We're pleased with the fair. The idea is to have clients come here and skip Baselworld, which is much more centered on watches. About J should be a preview to Basel and become the most important jewelry center in Europe," said De Micheli.

According to Virginie Simon, marketing and product manager at Casato, buyers shopping at Basel exhaust most of their budgets on watches before hitting the jewelry stands. "This fair is less confounding because it's jewelry only, so people can take their time to look and understand the collections. If it stays like this, it can easily compete with Basel," said Simon.

"We were happy with the international attendance and the positive reaction to the fair, though we can always do

better," added Franco Pianegonda, owner of Pianegonda. "Fairs for us are always a good way to meet up with the 800 sales points that carry the line internationally."

To lure buyers, the Fiera di Vicenza offered a full-package accommodation, footing the bill for travel and hotel expenses, chauffeured transportation and events such as mini concerts, ballet performances and art exhibitions.

Among the U.S. firms invited were Aaron Basha, Faraone Mennella, Hearts on Fire and Temple St. Clair.

In terms of product, some showcased the same collections they presented at Vicenzaoro in January, claiming they're developing new wares for Basel, while others offered previews.

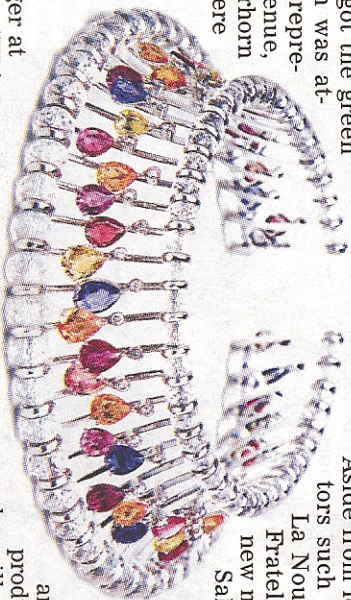
Aside from long-standing Vicenzaoro exhibitors such as Pianegonda, Stefan Hahner, La Nouvelle Baguette, Roberto Coin and Fratelli Staurino, About J attracted new names such as Chantecler, Fabio Salini and Vhernier.

Fabio Salini, a Rome-based designer at his first trade fair experience, said he made good contacts.

"The feedback was great and people appreciated the elegant and refined setting that allows the product to speak for itself," said Salini, who will also be at the National Jewelry Institute event in April in New York.

Salini, who bejewels Queen Rania of Jordan and Eva Mendes, handcrafts intricate pieces using precious stones, at times combined with leather, silk and tassels. Saks Fifth Avenue just picked up the line to sell through trunk show events, a good way to channel its one-of-a-kind artisanal element.

The news at Staurino Fratelli was colorful enamel hoop rings dotted with white diamonds and a flat mushroom-looking yellow gold ring with white and brown diamonds. Vhernier showed a versatile pair of earrings featuring two detachable discs covered in white and black diamond pavé. Casato featured a rose ring made with a rectangular rock crystal, its transparency revealing a branch motif in white diamond encrusted underneath.



Jewelry by Fabio Salini.

## FINDINGS

**POWERSOX LAUNCH:** PowerSox, a division of sock giant Gold Toe, is launching a line of specialty performance socks. The PowerSox Left/Right Technology

Anatomical Performance Fit sock matches the contour of the left and right foot, features a hand-linked seamless toe and utilizes state-of-the-art yarn that provides moisture-wicking and odor resistance.

"If you picture your foot, your big toe is bigger than your little toe, [and] nothing fits the same way," said Ander Horne, vice president of marketing for GoldToeMoretz, Gold Toe's parent company. "We're doing the same thing with socks. We're offering a nice, uniform fit." The collection, which retails from \$10.99 to \$26.99, is to hit specialty athletic stores in August.

**MOUNTAIN MERGER:** Planet Sox Holdings LLC and Mountain High Knitwear, both owned by Creo Capital Partners LLC, have merged operations and management teams. As a result, Mountain High Knitwear, one of the largest domestic suppliers of private label hosiery, will expand its business and distribute at the mid- to mass market at retailers such as Wal-Mart, Kmart and Sears. "The merger between Mountain High Knitwear and Planet Sox Holdings LLC was a strategic business move and will maximize their expertise in quality sock production and expand market share," said Gerald Birin, chief executive officer of Mountain High Knitwear and operating partner for Creo Capital Partners. "Both entities will operate with their current names because of their brand recognition in the sock and hosiery markets."

Additional announcements at Mountain High Knitwear include the promotion of Kellie Walejeski to chief operating officer from vice president of sales, the hiring of Richard Oelkers as vice president of sales and the naming of Tom Brown as chief marketing officer to manage the newly expanded stable of brands.