

FASHION & STYLE

The Ideal of Luxury

By NAZANIN LANKARANI MAY 13, 2015

MILAN — Behind the stately iron gates of the Villa Mozart, Giampiero Bodino spends his days creating objects of desire. Yet, as the veteran Italian jewelry designer talks, it is clear that the work really is a personal pleasure.

“I have been given a gigantic chance to do ‘high high’ jewelry, but really I do what pleases me,” he said — like the Caterina parure, named for Catherine de Medici, the Florentine noblewoman who became queen of France. The pink gold set uses cabochon rubellites and faceted pink sapphires to recreate the arabesque motifs of rose windows in Romanesque churches.

“Here, the traditional structure of the necklace disappears and you have a naturalistic motif within a geometric structure,” the 54-year-old designer explained. “The stones are an even brighter, denser pink when they are removed from the spotlight.”

Decades in luxury

Mr. Bodino’s brand, founded in 2013, presented its first collection last September at the Biennale des Antiquaires in Paris. But his name already was well known in jewelry circles. His career began in the 1970s with automotive design in Turin, Italy, then he moved to Rome to learn jewelry design with Gianni Bulgari and, later, freelanced for some of the biggest names in Italian fashion, including Gucci, Versace and Prada.

In 2002 Mr. Bodino became creative director at the luxury group Richemont, advising management and its jewelry and watchmaking companies,

which include Cartier and Van Cleef & Arpels, on their vast lineup of products and even window displays. (He will not talk about his achievements, though: “I was a ghost designer like one is a ghost writer.”)

One-third of Richemont’s sales are in jewelry, a category it wants to develop. So “Richemont made a strategic decision to develop a maison where the client played an integral part in the creative process,” Bernard Fornas, the co-chief executive of the company, said in a telephone interview from Geneva.

“Today, luxury is about making a dream come true,” Mr. Fornas said. “With Bodino, we are in the domain of ‘grand luxe,’ which is taking the art of the unique to the ultimate step, realizing a very personal dream.”

The dream begins a few blocks from the fashionable Via Montenapoleone, in a 1930s villa built in the local style known as Italian Rationalism. While Mr. Bodino does not live on the leafy grounds, it is his work home, where he welcomes clients by appointment only.

“This is a very private, personal ambiance where clients, whether they buy or not, live the experience of discovering this place and establishing a rapport with the designer,” he said as he settled into one of the living room’s plush sofas. “It is less about the jewelry as it is about creating memories.”

His own monochromatic paintings hang on the walls. In his office, a wide desk overflows with sketchbooks, watercolor kits, toys and art books.

And every room is filled with antique-pink peonies, which complement the floral frescos on the ceilings. The flowers are the exact shade of pink that Mr. Bodino has chosen for the suede lining of his jewelry boxes.

“Peonies are my favorite flowers, but only in this particular shade of pink,” the designer said.

Four display vitrines were built into the dining room walls. (“When you make unique pieces, you cannot have a shop window on the street,” he explained.) Of the pieces carefully chosen for display, names such as Barocco, Mosaico and Tesori del Mare evoke the aristocratic Grand Tours of the 19th century. Others, like Lucrezia, Caterina or Artemisia, pay homage to women of

Italian legend.

“For now, my style has a certain Italian classicism,” he said. “I love this country and much of my inspiration comes from the beauty of Italy, but if I were to travel to India I am sure it would show in my work.”

As a counterpoint to the traditional, the unusual color combinations of Mr. Bodino’s designs and the execution of his Paris-based artisans give creations like a baroque necklace of diamonds and African paraiba tourmalines an unexpected modernity.

“All you need is a man’s shirt worn open at the collar and slightly over the necklace, a pair of jeans, and you are done,” the designer said.

An experience

In his own way, Mr. Bodino embodies the romantic image of a highly skilled artist working with precious gems to create something unique for the client.

“Luxury brands are rediscovering the origins of luxury even as the industry becomes more global,” said Ketty Pucci-Sisti Maisonrouge, a luxury entrepreneur and adjunct professor of luxury strategies at Columbia Business School, in a telephone interview from New York. “For very high net worth individuals, the private experience and one-on-one exclusivity are what resonate most.”

And to create excitement, luxury groups must bring in new talent, she said. “What better way than to use someone they know and trust?”

“We believe in the talent of Giampiero, whom we have known for years,” Mr. Fornas said. “Given his talent, his refinement and his love of jewelry, it was a small step for Richemont to facilitate the creation of his jewelry maison.”

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