



To stay ten steps ahead, one needs to take twenty steps in the present to fulfil one's mission. It is all about living in the present, and building for the future. Vicenzaoro Winter, the first international show of the calendar year, unleashed a slew of new features to move ahead on the futuristic roadmap that it had chalked out for itself a couple of years ago. Shanoo Bijlani reports.



VICENZAORO WINTER 2013

Shaping the Future of Italian Jewellery



Fope



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Roberto Ditri

The Vicenzaoro Winter 2013 was bigger and grander this time with a total number of 1,478 exhibitors spread over 28,420 square metres of exhibition space. Barring some parts of Europe, the global markets are slowly recovering and a healthy indicator of that was the 29,000 buyers who attended the show from different parts of the world to source some of the best designed, futuristic and trendy jewels. Held alongside the main Vicenzaoro fair, the 36th edition of T-Gold, the technology and gold processing machinery show, had 120 participants this year, and recorded a total of 12,000 visitors from five continents.

In tune with its mission, this year the Fiera di Vicenza organisers have planned a series of international summits themed under the title: *The Future. Now.* for all its three editions. (Read 'The Shape of Things to Come' on page 71.)

The show, which is truly turning into an international one-stop-shop for sourcing couture jewellery, attracted visitors from Russia, the Middle East, Far East, Eastern Europe, and Greece among others.

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In the period from January to September 2012, Switzerland continued to remain the main export destination for Italy, accounting for 21.9% of its total exports in value terms. The UAE accounted for 17.3% of its total exports, the US, 8.8%, followed by France with 6.8%. China, which accounted for 5.1% exports in value, registered a 19% increase year-on-year for the same period. Italians are also finding Russia to be a favourable export destination for their jewellery, registering a growth of 10% for the same period in 2011.

In his press statement, Roberto Ditri, president of Fiera di Vicenza, said, "The influx of visitors [at the show] is a positive sign for the jewellery world, especially for Italian-made products. If the abundance of Italian traders is a good sign, then the presence of foreigners, particularly in terms of the quality and determination of buyers, is extremely significant. At the moment the economy of the jewellery industry is dragging, and for this reason, the fact that we saw retailers from Canada, the US and Central America, Russia and the ex-Soviet Republics, Asia, the Middle East and Turkey is enormously satisfying. The increase in the number of visitors from the Balkans and Greece is also interesting."

Trends and more

Since Vicenzaoro is the first show of the year, many exhibitors, new and old, like to use it as a testing ground for checking the popularity of their innovative collections.

In general, though, gem slices continued to reign this season. Rose gold and rhodium-plated brown and black gold were the new flavour at the show. In order to keep the gold weight in check, three-dimensional forms articulated with thin wires, jewellery with negative spaces were a common sight at the fair. All this was obviously linked to the growing cost of the yellow metal. Top-end exhibitors like Garavelli also introduced 9-karat gold jewellery with jet.

Sterling silver and gold-plated silver jewels were the new metals of choice. And



Vendorella

so also was the use of alternative materials such as coloured leather, wood, fabric, resin, jet, and tulle. (Read 'In Fashion' on page 76.)

Solitaire met many first-time exhibitors, who got a positive response for their unique collections that enticed international buyers.

Jonathan Le Vian, sales executive of Le Vian, New York, a debutant at the fair this year, said, "We have introduced a line set with neon tangerine fire opals. The Exotics line is set with different coloured diamonds such as blue, yellow, red, green and called mix berry, blue berry, midnight berry, comes with National Radiation Certificates since the diamonds are irradiated."

The American firm is looking to expand its footprints in international markets this year. "Although we are established in the US, UK, the Caribbean, and Canada, we want to establish ourselves in Europe, China and India, and we are moving in that direction. We are here to test this market. Based on the response to our collections, we will plan for the Vegas show." Le Vian has got positive responses for its Chocolate Bridal collection. "Many

brides are favouring chocolate diamonds as centre stones for their bridal rings," explained Le Vian.

He anticipated a slowdown in the production of chocolate coloured diamonds, mined at Argyle. "We will have to wait until the miners go deeper into the earth to source rough. We are starting to procure the stones in advance to meet the growing demand. A huge percentage of our sales come from the bridal segment," said Jonathan Le Vian. "Currently, the trend seems to be tilting towards strawberry gold, and honey gold set with Vanilla diamonds. We also use a special, expensive black rhodium from Germany to make the coloured stones stand out in contrast."

Revealing that he had visited India only last week, Jonathan said that he wants to understand and explore the market.

The show was a busy one for the firm. "It is about the visibility that marks our presence at the show. Many international visitors are surprised to see us here!"

Gaurav Nigam, director of a high-end jewellery brand Nigaam, New York, said that they make different jewellery for different markets. While jewellery for the



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Fabulous Unrounds

US is more generic, for Hong Kong it is petite, and in the Gulf region it is bolder. At the fair, Nigam sold many pieces of the rose-cut tanzanite collection and

the tassel collection created with emeralds, pearls and diamonds.

Another first-timer, Divine Gems, the Antwerp marketing associate of Indian-based firm H. Dipak, who have also introduced the jewellery brand Fabulous Unrounds, were positive about the show. The firm, which specialises in fancy cut diamonds, were pioneers in popularising the princess cut globally 17 years ago. They were also the biggest producers of princess cut diamonds. Today, however, they have a diversified portfolio of fancy cut diamonds such as heart, oval, pear, emerald, marquise, cushion and radiant. The brand uses a varied mix of diamond cuts (save the round cuts) to create some truly unique pieces. "Our biggest market for fancy cuts is America," says Ankit Mehta director of H.Dipak. "There is a strong demand for fancy shapes in India

and China as well. We are in Vicenzaoro to develop business in Europe, UK and France. However, we didn't want to enter new markets just as a loose diamond manufacturer. So, we have come up with this interesting jewellery brand to target the younger population across the world."

Hemant Shah of Priority, India, too, presented new collections, especially designed for the show. The firm got a good number of queries for its silver jewellery with stained glass effect created by the use of coloured gems. "The gems are hand polished till they became transparent," informed Shah. A generous use of quartz, emeralds and tourmalines made this collection a winner. Responding to a question about the brittleness of the jewellery that proclaimed 'handle me with care', Shah, revealed, "The surface does not get scratched, but yes, brittleness is the main issue with this collection. Even while polishing we experienced a 50% breakage of stones, but we could absorb the loss as quartz is not so expensive. However, the first pendant that came out of the lab took exactly a year, and was tried on by a subject for a month to check its wearability and



Alba SNC

sustainability quotient." The company also introduced a lightweight baroque collection with negative spaces; a wire-inspired collection in 14- and 18-karat gold, and a stone-in-stone collection that produced translucent illusions.

First-timer Haim Shuval of Alba SNC, Italy, showcased baubles in silver and 18-karat gold that immediately caught one's eye. Shuval was in the garment business for 30 years and had stayed for the better part of his life in New Delhi. In his Italy-meets-India jewels, one could see a heavy Indian influence – zardosi jewels, kundan-set pendants, Buddha earrings, embroidered bracelets. "I was surprised to receive a positive response at the fair. From a fun venture, I have landed into serious business," remarked Shuval, who displayed bracelets made of embroidered cloth. "The idea is to make something from nothing," he said. Shuval was flooded with orders at the fair for his jewellery that started from €200 at wholesale price.

Italian essence

During the show, inclement weather and heavy snowfall had resulted in temporary

closure of many airports in Europe and UK. Many Italian exhibitors who were expecting clients from the nearby regions felt that visitor footfall had been affected due to it. But they all seemed happy as they got unexpected buyers from different countries.

A spokesperson of Casato informed that inclement weather had prevented their buyers from Paris and London from reaching the show. He said, "Most of our clients this time are from Europe, Far East, Central Asia." Casato sells jewellery to 90% of the world including the Middle East, Russia, South Africa, US, UK, and East European nations. "Buyers from Russia and the CIS countries are our newest clients," he informed.

D'Orica's Giovanni Gnoato was extremely happy with the response for his new collection which was a combination of fancy items, and necklace sets with a blend of black and brown gold. Although the firm has a fewer number of clients from America and Europe, D'Orica's 18-karat jewels are a hit in the Middle East, Central

Asia, Far East Asia, and Russia. Gnoato said, "The competition is tough but we are always a step ahead as we keep a complete control over the production – from melting gold to the final product. This time, word-of-mouth publicity from our distributors helped us get new customers from Russia."

Valerio Beleggia, product manager, and son of Landranco Beleggia, president and CEO of Bros Manufacture, Rosato (the founder partner of Rosata changed hands in September 2012, but chose to retain the design philosophy of the previous owners) explained, "Charms are an integral part of our business, too, but we have added our own creative tweaks to the product line crafted in silver and 18-karat gold."

Rosato makes scaled down versions of actual products including shoes, bags, cars,



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and so on. Earlier, the charms had a more toy-like quality about them, but now they are more refined, informed Beleggia.

He was of the firm belief that business is not just about selling jewels but selling a story; each piece is special and interwoven with a charming aspect of life. “We are the leaders in fashion jewellery and have a heritage and expertise to understand fine jewellery,” he added. The company that only started some months ago is already retailing through 200 Italian stores and is planning to expand in the Middle East this year. Strategising about their product placement, Beleggia explained that they would limit their sales of silver charms in Italy, while they would sell gold charms across the world. The company, he revealed, spends about one million euros on research alone, and has a clearly defined policy of using a type of enamel that blends with the surface of silver jewellery and another enamel type for gold charms. Even the casting methods are being re-worked upon to rein in quality control. Rosato’s silver charms retail at \$80 to \$200, while the gold charms retail at \$800 to \$20,000. The collections are embellished

with precious gemstones and diamonds. “Needless to say, we have received a good response for our jewellery,” he beamed. To keep in step with the time, this year, Rosato will spend more than two million euros on advertisement alone. They already have set up two flagship stores in Milan and Rome, and the third is in the offing.

“It is about the art of selling jewellery,” noted Beleggia. “The world of jewellery is soon going to witness a transition. We have to find a new way to showcase our jewels in terms of product branding and design, and change the method of selling jewellery.”

However, not all participants at the show exhibited the same kind of exuberance. Some exhibitors said that sales were impacted because of the economic slowdown in Europe. Most Italian retailers (visitors) were absent from the show.

Sara Fraleoni of Fraleoni believed that local issues such as unemployment and an uneasy political situation and the impending poll in February, have kept the Italian jewellery market on hold. “Still, it was business as usual,” she said, “with clients from Brazil, Russia and the Middle East picking up the daily wear range in enamelled silver at €300 to €600 at retail price and gold trinkets between €1,500 and €3,000.” The fine jewellery segment, however, saw no movement at the booth.



Dea



Rosato



Confirming Fraleoni’s statement on the absence of Italian buyers at the show, Daniele Bruni of Pasquale Bruni said that Vicenzaoro was truly becoming a hub for international buyers to source jewellery. He also said that there was significant traffic at their booth from Greek and Turkish retailers looking for couture collections. “Turkey and Greece are benefiting from Russia and East European tourists,” he said, explaining the frenzied buying spree from these countries. “We have also had the opportunity to meet buyers from Eastern Europe, from countries like Azerbaijan, the Czech Republic and Kazakhstan, who are always on the lookout for conspicuous and luxury collections.”

Oromalia, a Florence-based company, known for marrying gold with ebony, leather and rubber, were on a winning wicket. They have the distinction of using leather in fine jewellery for more than two decades and wood for more than 15 years. “We work with rose, yellow and white gold and our bestsellers are priced at €2,700 at wholesale. Our main clients are from northern Europe, Germany, Austria, Poland, Belgium, Spain, New York, and Dallas.”

Italian-based firm Dea specialises in silver jewellery with unusual combinations of gems and commonplace materials. They had soft tulle flowers centre-pinned with carved stone, earrings with embroidered fabric motifs, ear pendants featuring textile prints and more. Their silver jewellery comes with a non-tarnish guarantee of five years.

The owners of Dea are two dynamic sisters, Annalisa Nicchi, marketing partner, and Julia, the creative head. Together, they have elevated silver to the haute couture segment. The affordable lines range from €70 to €1,200. Established in 1999, Dea today retails through 600 shops in Italy. Thanks to their on and off presence at the fair, they have met new clients from Shanghai, Greece, Turkey, Russia and Ukraine. This year, they struck a deal with a Russian partner to establish their first mono-brand store in St. Petersburg. Annalisa says, “We believe that jewellery is not for the occasion, it is a fashion statement. While most fashion designers branch out to making jewellery, we will try our hand at making fashionable clothes, soon!”

Elisa Cencini of Maria Sole Giolli



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Maria Sole Giolletti



started off 18 years ago in Arezzo, Italy. Bored of the machine-made gold jewellery that her family made, she sidestepped them by doing nature-inspired jewels. A country girl at heart, the picturesque Tuscany feeds her imagination. The different seasons and flora form the backbone of her designs. "I use natural stones in my organic designs. Each piece is handcrafted to perfection to replicate the drooping leaf or a flower in full bloom. Many pieces are unique and use pearls, diamonds, corals and other gemstones," she said. She had designed two collections in 18-karat gold and silver-plated jewels for the fair. This was just her third time at the show and already New York and Lebanon are her biggest markets today. "The positive response at the Vicenzaoro fair has encouraged me to participate in Dubai and Hong Kong exhibitions in the future."

Lucky hits

And then there were exhibitors who came

from different countries – the regulars, who came prepared and did decent business.

Oro Africa is a fine jewellery brand that is 68 years old and uses ethically mined gold, and exports to US, UK, and Australia. The firm in partnership with Rand Refinery, the world's largest precious metal refinery, makes 'absolute' wedding bands under the brand name Rand Pure that come with a guarantee and chain of custody – from ore to store. The firm believes in investing a substantial amount in the human rights programme. Each piece of jewellery is bubble wrapped, has a unique code number, and comes with an FSC certification. "Retailers who buy this jewellery can position themselves as socially responsible jewellers who make a positive impact on the world," said the company spokesperson Madrie Scott. "We will soon bring in 18-karat gold rings embellished with tanzanite and



(Left) Thin stackable gold rings with diamonds, rubies and sapphires; (Right) Rings in silver with enamel and diamonds. By Sunjewels

diamonds. We have been getting a great response from different parts of the world at the show."

For Eduardo Bruner of Brumani, Vicenzaoro is a very important show because it focuses only on jewellery. The second-generation jeweller sells in US, Latin America, Eastern Europe, Kazak, Russia and Ukraine. "Thanks to this fair, we got a good distributor based in the UK, who will be our entry point into Europe. It is a very competitive market but we are focussing on mid to high end markets, and have a range of jewellery that retails from \$1,500 to \$40,000," noted Bruner. Brumani is famous for its lively 18-karat jewellery which is set with the best of untreated coloured stones, mostly from Brazil like morganite, Paraiba tourmaline set in 18-karat gold.

Underlining the importance of Vicenzaoro, Divanyanshu Navlakha of Sutra Jewels, US, said that at this fair, he

inevitably converts a walk-in into a new customer almost every day. "That is the reason why I consider it to be worth my while to be at the show," he said. His jewels, mainly chandelier earrings, outfitted with slices of opal, quartz, emerald, tanzanite, sapphire, and diamond scored high on the bestselling list. Green is the pantone colour of the year and so, emerald sliced dangles embellished with diamonds saw good demand from Italy, Austria, and Greece. The tasselled dangles, created with emeralds, pearls and other stones too, were favoured. "The European market is slow, and the Hong Kong and American markets are some shades better than that, but for us Vicenzaoro is the one place that helps us connect with global buyers," he concluded.

Kapil and Neeraj Nivetia of Sunjewels showcased some interesting jewellery in top top light brown diamonds sourced from the Argyle mines; silver jewels with

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nano ceramic coating, playful labyrinth jiggly jewellery with Swarovski stones from the Fun and Games collection, molten lava set with pink and yellow sapphires and icy diamonds, the list was never ending. Some interesting twists in jewellery were introduced to keep the gold weight down such as the thin one-gram gold stackable rings, set with diamonds and sapphires at a suggested retail price of \$350. "Do not go by their looks, the rings are thin, but strong and light," said the Nivetia brothers. "The Vicenzaoro show is important for us and we have fared better than last year. We supply to 15 countries and we are evenly spread in North America, Europe, Australia, but would like to explore Latin America. Ironically, we don't sell in India. The bulk of the visitors came to the show through prior appointments, but we are more than happy to entertain a few walk-ins. We are cautiously optimistic about the



(Above) Hollow bracelet in gold with pave diamonds; (Below) Necklace and bracelet in silver with lava and diamonds. By Sunjewels



way forward," they continued, "and our game plan is to constantly stay ahead of competition by innovating regularly."

Romy Mehta, founder of Bapalal Keshavlal, Mumbai, said that he benefited from being relocated to a new location at the exhibiton as he got a lot of visibility. "My regular clients are from Brazil, South Africa, Costa Rica, the Middle East, Europe, Russian and Asia (except China)," he informed. "Vicenzaoro is a truly international show. It covers the range of countries where we want to be more visible – from the Middle East to South America and Asia. And it allows us to strengthen our contacts with our Italian, European and American customers."

Treat for buyers

With so many different varieties on offer, the buyers were in for a treat. The show was visited by several important buyer delegations from US, India and other nations to source jewellery and machinery. Visitor Michael Endlich, founder and designer, Pave Fine Jewelry, California, said that unlike the Vegas show, Vicenzaoro

gave him a new perspective on jewellery designs. "I saw a lot of nice and new work that was displayed in interesting ways. I was looking for new materials in wood and plastic in lower price points so that my clients back home could buy it. The high price of gold has paved the way for other materials like silver, wood, plastic and more." Endlich owns two stores in the US and his clients seek something different every time they walk in to make purchases. "We are best-known for customised jewellery. It is great fun and we make some really cool things for our clients," said Endlich, who is an award-winning designer himself, loves to handpick special gems for his creations. "It's like going to the beach and looking at all the rocks and finding the one that speaks to you and then designing a piece of jewellery around it." The US market, in general, has picked up. "Our clients are more than ever looking for value, something more lasting. There is so much jewellery on the market that all looks the same, all made by a computer, and so, handmade items by artists will be a strong category in the future."

Another American buyer Chris Graham was of the same view as Endlich. "In Vicenza, we look for unique jewellery designs, produced by Italian craftsmen that we don't get to see in America. Italians are great in everything they do, jewellery included. We want to select the very best for our customers; something that my competitors on the other side of the street will not find at JCK."

For Manish of Dhamani, Dubai, it was his first trip to the fair. "It is the most important event in the gold and jewellery sector. Fiera di Vicenza is doing its utmost to attract traders here, offering every possible comfort to buyers like me. I am happy to have had the chance to expand my customer base and inventory due to this."

Overall, a sense of undiluted optimism pervaded the show even as the Fiera di Vicenza organisers are busy harnessing the power of networking with different countries. The Italian jewellery industry is busy planting seeds that will bear fruit in the future. With so many reformative moves, change for the better is inevitable.



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