JEWELRY OF THE 1990S

By Elise B. Misiorowski

This article provides an overview of the many changes that took place in how jewelry was designed, manufactured, and marketed during the last decade. Driven by a highly competitive market that favored the unique, designers created innovative cuts for diamonds and colored stones. The use of gem materials in the 90s was marked by a greater demand for fancy-color diamonds, colored stones in dramatic combinations, and large and multicolored cultured pearls. In precious metals, the emphasis shifted toward platinum and other white metals. Designer jewelry took on a variety of distinctive setting styles, textures, and motifs. As designers sought to distinguish themselves through name recognition, the branding of diamonds and finished jewelry became a major force. Jewelry worn by entertainers and promoted in the mass media touched off instant trends, which the new marketplace of television shopping networks and the Internet was able to accommodate directly.

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For the jewelry world, the decade of the ‘90s was an eclectic one, filled with strong contrasts and balanced opposites. Jewelry design expanded in every direction, with the wide variety of motifs ranging from ancient or ethnic (figure 1) to ultramodern. There was a Renaissance in cutting styles for both diamonds and colored gems, and pearls reached new heights of popularity.

The economic ups and downs in the ‘90s had a profound effect on the jewelry world. Japan, the strongest market for jewelry as the decade opened, went into an economic recession in the early ‘90s, setting off a domino effect on the economies of Korea, Thailand, and the rest of Southeast Asia. Although there was a slump in consumer spending in those areas, it was offset by the new buying power of China and a stronger jewelry market in the United States and Europe. Surveys indicated that the typical jewelry buyers of the ‘90s in the U.S. were young married women with full-time employment and no children, older women whose futures are secure, and teenagers (Precious & Fashion Jewelry Markets, 1997), while a study by the World Gold Council indicated that women are the primary jewelry buyers in Europe as well (“Market place...,” 1997). Fine jewelry became less formal, as it became an important part of the working woman’s wardrobe. More women wore pearls or diamonds with blue jeans and tennis dresses, integrating fine jewelry into every aspect of their lives.

At the same time, the discovery and mining of new gem deposits, as discussed in the “Localities” article elsewhere in this issue (Shigley et al., 2000), made many gems more available. New cuts for both colored stones and diamonds were introduced, revitalizing jewelry design. In addition, jewelry competitions proliferated, further stimulating design and shifting the direction of jewelry styles, while promotion of jewelry through the media—both print and film—stimulated consumer demand. With strong competition in the marketplace for jewelry and gems, jewelers and gem dealers began promoting their particular “brand,” and branding became a strong and increasingly important trend in the ‘90s. The potential power of the Internet as a marketing tool for jewelry also became evident, and auction hous-
es played a greater role in the marketing of contemporary as well as estate jewelry.

All of these developments—and more—contributed to a decade that saw both subtle advances and dramatic innovations in the use of gem materials, as well as in the design and marketing of jewelry. As space is limited, this overview will focus on capturing the essence of trends in fine gemstone jewelry (excluding watches) as seen in the U.S. market rather than attempt to address every nuance of change in the international jewelry world. Similarly, as it is impossible to credit every important jewelry designer of the decade here, the emphasis will be on those who made significant advances in jewelry design or gem cutting, or whose work exemplified specific trends during this period.

DIAMONDS

Trends. There were several new twists in the diamond market. Advertising and promotion of diamonds created a more enlightened and interested consumer so that, in areas where the economy was strong—Japan in the early ’90s and the U.S. later in the decade—there was a new demand for quality. The ’90s buyer was interested in diamonds that were not only of high color and clarity, but were cut to good proportions as well. As a result, a number of dealers began to promote as a name brand standard-cut diamonds that guaranteed quality. Lazare Kaplan International set the trend with the Lazare Diamond, which was cut to “Tolkowsky Ideal” proportions (“Designer diamonds...,” 1997). Other companies swiftly followed suit, and brand-name diamonds became a hot new trend. “Branded” diamonds fell into four specific categories: well-fashioned standard cuts, such as the Lazare Diamond; new varieties of fancy cuts, such as the Quadrillion and the Criss Cut; treated diamonds, such as those that were Yehuda fracture-filled; and diamonds from specific sources (often with distinctive colors), such as Argyle pink and “champagne” diamonds. Several companies also developed lines of jewelry designed around their branded diamonds, further increasing their market exposure (Federman, 1997).

Not only was there a strong market for standard- and fancy-cut diamonds, but interest also developed in antique cuts such as the briolette, rondelle, old European, and rose. Even early table and portrait cuts, which date from the 16th and 17th centuries, made a showing, as did diamond beads, which are without historic precedent but have an old-fashioned look (Federman, 2000). Briolettes gained popularity as pendants and earring drops, rondelles were used as spacers in important pearl and gem bead necklaces, and diamond beads were offered in dazzling single strands or mixed with other gem beads in necklaces and bracelets (figure 2). Rose, old European, table, and portrait cuts were incorporated into antique-style jewelry as well as into some ultramodern styles. Even the natural beauty of rough diamonds was appreciated, as octahedral, dodecahedral, and cube-shaped diamond rough was set in jewelry during this highly unusual decade.

Without listing every diamond cut brand, it is important to mention some of the new shapes and facet arrangements developed during the 1990s, as many of these provided the impetus for innovative...
jewelry design. Developed in the 1980s, square brilliant cuts for diamonds, known as Princess cuts, and rectangular brilliants grew in popularity during the '90s. Much of this popularity was due to the fact that rectilinear brilliant cuts made it possible—for the first time—to invisibly set diamonds. In the late 1930s, when invisible settings were first introduced, the technique was used only with rubies, sapphires, and emeralds. At that time, rectilinear diamonds were step cut and the metal grid used to hold the gems from beneath was easily visible through them. Square brilliant diamonds, however, break up the light so that it is impossible to see the metal that holds the stones. Invisibly set diamonds became a strong stylistic feature of '90s jewelry by such companies as Ambar Diamonds, who patented their square brilliant cut as the Quadrillion (“Square cut brilliance,” 1994; [figure 3]). The fact that square and rectangular brilliant cuts also concentrate color in diamonds may have contributed to the popularity of these cuts as interest in fancy-color diamonds increased.

In addition, the four-lobed Lily cut (by Eternity Diamond Corp.) and the five-pointed Star cut (by Fancoldi) are two unusual shapes developed during this period, while the Context and Spirit Sun cuts, designed by Bernd Munstein, were radical departures from standard cuts. The Context cut is polished as a perfect octahedron to emulate one of diamond’s natural crystal habits. The Spirit Sun consists of a series of triangular facets radiating from center culets on both crown and pavilion to imitate the sun’s rays (figure 4; Federman, 1997).

Melee and calibré-cut diamonds continued to be popular throughout the '90s in pavé and channel settings. This may have been driven by the fact that cutting operations in Israel stepped up their production of precision-cut, calibré goods, while India and Thailand produced large quantities of small, inexpensive diamonds ("Thailand," 1991; Even-Zohar, 1997). In counterpoint to this, demand for larger diamonds increased as the decade progressed. The stock market boom in the U.S. during the late '90s, along with the success of many Internet companies, brought sudden wealth to a surprising number of business entrepreneurs. As a way to demonstrate their new affluence, these entrepreneurs began to acquire large, fine-quality diamonds of 5 ct and above (Shor, 1998).

**Fancy-Color Diamonds.** Traditionally considered rare and exceptional, fancy-color diamonds became
more prominent in the 1990s. This was primarily due to the greater availability of fancy brown, yellow, and pink diamonds from Australia’s prolific Argyle mine and the promotional program launched to sell them. The marketing blitz for these stones inspired greater interest in all fancy-color diamonds, which were frequently featured in designer jewelry. Because Argyle’s colored diamonds are typically small, they are primarily suited for pavé work, which stimulated a trend for colored diamond pavé jewelry. Even black diamonds, previously considered primarily for industrial use, were cut and pavé set with colorless diamonds and other gems to dramatic effect (Federman, 1999a). Fawaz Gruosi of de Grisogono was one of the earliest to use black diamonds in jewelry. He came out with a striking line in 1997 that incorporated pavé black and colorless diamonds in areas of strong contrast. The trend was soon adopted by a few other designers, including Michelle Ong, who interpreted it in her own style (figure 5).

There was also increased demand for larger fancy-color diamonds. Although yellow, brown, and pink were again the colors most frequently seen in sizes over a carat (figure 6), diamonds of blue, red, violet, orange, and green hues, in various tones and saturations, found ready buyers among connoisseurs and collectors (Bogel and Nurick, 1997; Heebner, 2000). In response to this demand for colored diamonds and their greater availability, GIA fine-tuned its color grading system for fancy-color diamonds in the mid-1990s (King et al., 1994). This period also saw the greater use of irradiated diamonds, which brought colored diamonds to a wider clientele.
COLORED GEMSTONES

Trends. Rubies and emeralds had the strongest market share early in the decade but suffered credibility setbacks toward the end, when highly charged treatment controversies were aired on television and blazoned in the press (see, e.g., Bergman, 1998). As concerns heightened about treatment in emeralds and rubies (see the “Localities” and “Treatments” articles elsewhere in this issue), other colored gems gained prominence. Strong favorites were tanzanite and tsavorite, rhodolite, and Mandarin garnets from Africa, while fancy-color sapphires from Sri Lanka, Africa, and (later in the decade) Madagascar grew in popularity. Deep blue, “electric” blue, and “neon” green tourmalines from Brazil’s Paraíba mines were instant winners, while more red and bright pink spinels from Myanmar appeared on the market. Opals of every sort from Australia continued to be steady sellers.

Colored gems were featured as the focal point in jewelry surrounded by diamonds, or they appeared with other gems of saturated hues. Typical were rich and unusual combinations such as red spinel with orange spessartine garnet, purple amethyst with deep red rhodolite, green tsavorite with violet-blue tanzanite, “golden” yellow sapphire with blue sapphire, Imperial green jade with ruby, blue sapphire with hot pink spinel, green tourmaline with rhodolite garnet, orange citrine with brown or green zircon, and black onyx with iridescent mother-of-pearl or any of the above gems (figure 7).

In contrast to these vivid combos, lighter-toned, less intensely colored gems were also in vogue. Understated, but hardly aloof, the pastel hues of aquamarine, green beryl, rose quartz, “golden” as well as pink and lavender sapphires, light green and pink tourmalines, morganite, kunzite, iolite, and translucent blue chalcedony gained a fresh presence in jewelry of the ’90s (Kremkow, 1999).

Fascination with phenomenal gems also intensified. At the high end of the market, there were ready buyers for star ruby and sapphire, cat’s-eye chrysoberyl, alexandrite, and cat’s-eye alexandrite, while gem cognoscenti and collectors snapped up color-change sapphire and garnet. Moonstone, adularescent transparent labradorite (also known as rainbow moonstone), and virtually every variety of opal appeared in a wide range of jewelry as cabochons, beads and—for opal especially—as carvings and inlay (Dang, 1998; DePasque, 1999—figure 8).

Ornamental opaque and translucent gem materials such as lapis lazuli, black chalcedony, chrysoprase, turquoise, sugilite, malachite, and azurite-malachite were all brought into play as accent stones, in beads, or as inlay. Jade, a traditional favorite throughout Asia, gained new appreciation in the West. Imperial green jadeite commanded astonishing prices at auction: At the November 3,
1999, Christie’s sale in Hong Kong, for example, a cabochon ring sold for US$2,405,000, while a bangle sold for US$2,576,000. Both set new world records for these types of Imperial jadeite jewelry (“Jadeite jewellery,” 1999). Lavender jade and translucent white jade also increased dramatically in demand and value (Christie’s, 1999), whereas nephrite jade in green, yellow, orange, rust, and black was commonly used in jewelry during the 1990s.

Even gem varieties previously thought of strictly as collectors’ gems appeared in jewelry during the 1990s. These include blue-green apatite (mis-named “Paraiba” apatite in the trade because of its color similarity to the green tourmalines from Paraiba, Brazil), “golden” brown sphene, bright red rhodochrosite, and royal blue haüyne (see, e.g., Knox and Lees, 1997; Kiefert and Hänni, 2000). Although generally considered too soft or friable for most jewelry uses, these gems have strong color and show to great advantage in earrings, necklaces, or brooches, where they are not as susceptible to damage during wear.

**Cuts and Cutting.** There was much experimentation with gem cutting in the ‘90s, and designers—hungry for ways to stand out in the highly competitive market—immediately incorporated new and unusual cuts into eye-catching jewelry. Fantasy cuts, introduced by Bernd Munsteiner in the 1980s (“The father of fantasy,” 1991), evolved in wonderful ways in the hands of many additional artists. Michael Dyber added concave circular facets, called Dyber Optic Dishes, to flat facets in fantasy-cut transparent gemstones (figure 9). These concave facets reflect throughout the stone, like bubbles or planets orbiting in a galaxy (Weldon, 1994). Another innovation was Bart Curren’s Fantasy Interlocks, matching pairs of fantasy-cut stones in contrasting gem materials that fit together like pieces of a puzzle.

Fantasy cuts became more expansive in the hands of such lapidary artists as Glenn Lehrer and Steve Walters, who created wide, undulating carvings that rippled and coiled like waves or smoke (figure 10). Fashioned predominantly from black onyx, lapis, chrysoprase, and other chalcedonies, these carvings were a breakthrough style of the ‘90s. Artists created another compelling effect by retaining some of the gem’s natural polycrystalline [drusy] surface (figure 11). Glenn Lehrer also developed round disc shapes with a hole cut in the center, similar to a piece of Lifesavers candy. Applied to both transparent and translucent gems, his Torus Ring GemCut echoes the ancient Chinese “Pi,” symbol of eternity.

By rewarding innovation and excellence in the cutting of colored gems, the Cutting Edge competition [sponsored by the American Gem Trade Association [AGTA]] inspired gem cutters to devise new concepts. Outstanding among the many superb designer cuts are the concave facet cuts developed by Richard Homer, for which a special machine, the OMF Faceter, was developed (Homer, 1990). The integration of concave facets into a standard brilliant cut gives his finished gems a fluid, lacy appearance (Dick, 1990a; Taylor, 2000). Other innovative cuts that became more popular in the ‘90s included cushion or saddle shapes with step-cut facets covering their domed crowns in a checkerboard pattern, or in a single row similar to louver-blinds. Known
respectively as the “checker” and the “opposed bar” cuts [Vargas, 1975], they appeared primarily in rings or as graduated suites in necklaces. Drop-shaped briolette cuts also became highly fashionable for both transparent and translucent colored stones, particularly in earrings and necklaces. Some lapidaries, including Arthur Anderson, Michael Dyber, and Bart Curren, incorporated matte-finished facets to add an unusual visual texture to cut gems [Anderson, 1991; Johnson and Koivula, 1998, 1999].

Caboachon cuts continued to shine in the ‘90s, as virtually every popular gem material, both transparent and opaque, appeared in a host of different forms, including the standard round or oval cabochon, pyramidal “sugarloaf,” and many fancy shapes with buffed crowns and faceted pavilions. Even more radical departures from the standard cabochon became popular, such as flattened “tongues” and elongated bullet shapes, which were cut, for the most part, from chalcedony, garnet, beryl, tourmaline, and quartz.

Gemstone beads made a big comeback during the ‘90s in single- and multiple-strand necklaces and bracelets. In addition to the standard gem materials found in bead form, a number of additional gems were fashioned into beads as well. These included tanzanite, fluorite, spinel, and transparent labradorite. Beads appeared in many different shapes, such as smooth and faceted spheres, ovals, and lentil shapes, as well as polished cubes, cylinders, hearts, stars, and tumble-polished free-form pieces. In some cases, unpolished elongated rough crystals of aquamarine, green beryl, emerald, tourmaline, or topaz were sliced in chunks and drilled down their central axes as beads. Strung with gold bead spacers in close-fitting necklaces, these made a

Figure 10. The sinuous curves of this fantasy-cut black onyx look like rippling water or coiling smoke. Carved by Steve Walters, this approximately 5 cm long piece is set as a brooch designed by C. Y. Sheng. Photo by Maha Tannous.

Figure 11. Natural polycrystalline surfaces, known as druses, added appeal to fantasy carvings such as this one by Glenn Lehrer. The finished brooch, accented by a 12 mm South Sea cultured pearl and diamonds, resembles the spreading wings of an angel or a butterfly. Courtesy of Glenn Lehrer.
dramatic statement, at once primitive and sophisticated (figure 12). Single-strand, elastic-strung gemstone bead “Buddha” bracelets, also known as power beads, were a brief fashion in the late ’90s. Worn singly or in multiples, these bracelets were marketed for their esoteric healing properties (“Feng shwing,” 2000).

ORGANIC GEM MATERIALS

Pearls. Pearls were extremely important in the 1990s. When the Akoya cultured pearl industry suffered severe setbacks (Akamatsu, 1999), other pearl growers filled the void, keeping interest high and buying trends strong. Fine round Tahitian black and South Sea “cream” and “golden” cultured pearls in 12–19 mm sizes became very fashionable in high-end jewelry, usually as single-strand necklaces but often as suites, with a matching ring and earrings (figure 13). Drop shapes, in a range of colors, were ideally suited for pendants and earrings, and baroque shapes found immediate acceptance in distinctive brooches, mismatched earrings, and a wide variety of pendants. Previously rejected by the trade as blemished, grooved “circle” cultured pearls also found a ready market in the ‘90s (Weldon, 1999). The concentric rings provide an interesting texture and are often accompanied by bands of particularly strong orient. Imaginative jewelers, such as Christopher Walling, took blemished cultured pearls of good color and placed small bezel-set rubies, sapphires, or diamonds in the blemishes to enhance the pearl’s appearance and improve its marketability.

Many novel uses of pearls were developed and gained acceptance in the 1990s. One particularly unusual example is the faceted cultured pearl, which has dozens of symmetrical facets cut onto its surface (figure 14). Multicolored strands of cultured pearls became fashionable for necklaces and bracelets. Pairs of mabe pearls, set back-to-back in bezels, were strung as necklaces. Cultured abalone mabe pearls, introduced by New Zealand pearl farmers toward the end of the decade, made an appearance in rings, pendants, and earrings. Keshi pearls, the spontaneous by-products of the culturing process, became very popular in necklaces and bracelets (separated by short lengths of chain), as the center gem in rings, and set singly or in clusters for earrings.

The quality of Chinese freshwater cultured pearls improved dramatically during this decade, and by the late ‘90s they were appearing in a wide variety of shapes and luscious pastel colors. The
most notable were nearly spherical with high luster (figure 15), which equaled or surpassed Akoya cultured pearls in beauty [Federman, 1999b].

The U.S. freshwater pearl industry also gained attention in the ‘90s by introducing new shapes for cultured pearls. These included the flat disc, heart, rectangle, and pear, in addition to the standard oval, button, and baroque. Subsequently, China began producing coin-shaped freshwater cultured pearls [“Lucoral launches coin pearls,” 1998].

**Other Organic Gems.** In the 1980s, the use of ivory and tortoise shell was curtailed as elephants and hawksbill turtles were put on the endangered species list and given governmental protection. Fossilized Mammoth ivory, from animals already extinct, was used sparingly in place of elephant ivory. Coral, on the other hand, was overfished dur-

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**Figure 14.** Faceting was applied to pearls for the first time during the ‘90s. Dozens of facets add a unique dimension to the luster and orient of the black cultured pearls (left 14 mm, right 13 mm) in these two sculpted gold rings designed and fabricated by Katey Brunini of Solana Beach, California. Photo by Maha Tannous.

**Figure 13.** Tahitian black and South Sea cultured pearls in the 12–19 mm range became very popular during the ‘90s in single-strand chokers or in matching suites of jewelry. They were often enhanced by diamonds as shown here. Courtesy of J. Grahl Design; photo by Sylvia Bissonnette.

**Figure 15.** By the end of the decade, China was producing large, nearly spherical freshwater cultured pearls of high luster. Some of the finest examples appeared in a range of delicious pastel hues that became fashionable in multicolored strands such as the 10.0–12.6 mm Chinese freshwater cultured pearls shown here. Courtesy of King’s Ransom, Sausalito, California; photo © Harold & Erica Van Pelt.
ing the 1980s, and the resulting glut of material on the market put many dealers out of business as prices dropped (Grigg, 1993). Because overfishing also depleted many known sources for coral, environmental concerns put a further deterrent on trade as it became politically incorrect to use fine coral in jewelry. Only in the latter part of the 1990s did coral begin to make a modest comeback (figure 16).

Relatively ignored in prior decades, amber suddenly became popular following the huge success of the 1993 Steven Spielberg film, Jurassic Park, from the novel by Michael Crichton. The story was based on the premise that dinosaurs could be cloned using DNA from blood found in mosquitoes that had been trapped in amber. Demand for amber soared, and material from the Baltic Sea as well as the Dominican Republic and Brazil was fashioned into beads of every size and shape, or set in simple silver jewelry (“New popularity for amber...,” 1994).

**PRECIOUS METAL TRENDS**

**Platinum.** The most significant change in the use of precious metals during the 1990s was a shift in marketing emphasis from yellow gold to white metals—platinum, white gold, and silver. In the early ’90s, platinum became the metal of choice for Japan, at that time the strongest world market for jewelry. In the U.S., the shift toward platinum in jewelry began gradually, as it appeared first mixed with yellow gold. By the end of the decade, however, platinum used alone was more prevalent, partic-

**Gold.** Gold dominated the market, however, and the shift toward the use of higher-karat fineness continued. Whereas 14K gold continued to be popular in jewelry for the American mass market, 18K and 22K yellow gold became the norm for higher-end jewelry and in artist jewelry that used such techniques as granulation and weaving (figure 18; figure 17).
Different gold hues were used to pavé set gems of like color in a new type of monochrome jewel that appeared during the ’90s. This was manifest first as yellow diamonds set in yellow gold, pink diamonds set in rose gold, and colorless diamonds set in white gold instead of platinum. However, the fashion soon extended to include colored gems as well. Jewelers such as Ralph Esmerian, Graff, and J.A.R. (Joel Arthur Rosenthal) spearheaded the style in the early ’90s, but others adopted the trend and expanded on it as the decade advanced [Proddow and Fasel, 1996].

**Silver and Other Metals.** Silver jewelry was especially popular with the teen and young professional market. Bold and powerful pieces were set predominantly with amethyst, citrine, garnet, aquamarine, moonstone, tourmaline, and different varieties of chalcedony. Often, touches of yellow gold were used to give the jewelry a more sophisticated look. Designer David Yurman’s line of silver jewelry augmented by touches of gold captured the market for young professionals who were looking for strong, dramatic jewelry that they could comfortably wear anywhere with anything [figure 19; Okun, 1998]. His efforts to brand his distinctive “cable” look were so successful that he became a household name during this decade. Silver also was used to set diamonds, rubies, and sapphires, a practice that had been out of fashion since the introduction of platinum for jewelry in the late 19th century. In a style initiated by J.A.R., diamonds and fine colored stones were pavé set in blackened silver to give it an antique appearance.

Other metals also were used in jewelry during the 1990s. Titanium, which enjoyed a flurry of interest as a refractory metal in jewelry of the mid-’80s, began to be used to pavé set diamonds and colored stones. Because titanium is durable and strong, but lighter in weight than platinum, gold, or silver, it can be used to fabricate large pieces that are still comfortable to wear [Thompson, 1998]. The husband-and-wife team Emmanuel and Sophie Guillaume [E.S.G.], use titanium in large brooches that are exquisitely pavé set with colored gems and diamonds [figure 20]. They also occasionally use iron in jewelry, along with gold and platinum, as they feel that “iron provides the right amount of rigidity and stability for certain parts of large pieces” [E. Guillaume, pers. comm., 2000].
SETTING STYLES

In addition to pavé work, other ways of mounting gemstones—bezel settings, tension settings, flush mountings, and invisible settings—were prevalent in the 1990s. In high-end jewelry, the pronged setting that was typical gave way to a new preference for bezel-set diamonds and colored stones. Tension settings, introduced by Niessing in the 1980s, became more widespread as they were adopted by a number of other companies. Steven Kretchmer of the U.S. holds a patent on his technique, which secures the gem under 12,000 pounds of pressure per square inch [Thompson, 1996]. Only diamonds, rubies, and sapphires that have been individually selected to be free of certain inclusions can withstand this type of setting. There was also a fashion for very small melee diamonds set flush with the surrounding metal as accents in jewelry. These flush-mounted diamonds were placed in loose arrangements on the shanks of rings, on the edges of cuff bracelets, or on individual links of chain necklaces and bracelets, so that the pieces appear to have been dusted with sugar or stars (figure 21).

The Mystère setting for diamonds, introduced by Bunz of Germany, was also highly innovative.
The diamond is seated with its culet in a cone-shaped cup and its table held by a point of metal almost as if the stone were held between thumb and forefinger. This allows the diamond to rotate in the mounting while it is nevertheless safely held in place (figure 22). Michael Good, whose unusual technique of anticlastic raising was a breakthrough style in the 1980s [Blauer, 1985], began to add gems to the fluid loops of his jewelry. In anticlastic raising, a flat sheet of 18K gold or platinum is cut in various shapes and then hammered so that the center is compressed and the edges are stretched, causing the metal to spread and coil into deceptively simple curvilinear jewels [Good, 1985]. During the ‘90s, Good began to set baguette diamonds along the seams of his bracelets and rings, and placed single gems—often a Context-cut or Spirit Sun diamond—in the center of rings or pendants, forging the metal so that it curled back and held the gem firmly in place (figure 23; see again figure 4).

NEW TECHNOLOGY EXPANDS: LASERS AND COMPUTERS

Lasers, introduced in the 1970s as a diamond-cutting tool, were applied to jewelry manufacture by such pioneers as Martin Stuart [Weldon, 1992]. As the decade progressed, laser technology advanced and equipment became more affordable, so more jewelers used lasers for jewelry manufacture and repair. The enormous advantage of the laser is that a bench jeweler can make delicate repairs to jewelry set with heat-sensitive materials without having to unmount all the gems. Because the laser’s ray is tiny and concentrated, it can make pinpoint solder joints or welds without distributing much heat, which minimizes the risk of damage [Todd Bracken, pers. comm., 2000]. This was a major breakthrough for the repair of antique and estate jewelry set with pearls, channel-set colored stones, or pavé diamonds, which otherwise would be extremely time consuming, if not impossible, to accomplish.

The computer became an essential tool for everyone in the ‘90s. At the same time that e-business exploded on the Internet, computers became indispensable in areas such as inventory control, gem grading, appraisals, and—most notably—in the design and manufacture of jewelry. CAD/CAM (computer-aided design/computer-aided manufacture) made it possible to design a piece of jewelry in three dimensions on the computer screen and have
the image translated into wax that could be cast, molded, and produced in multiples—a tremendous time-saver for mass-manufacturing jewelry companies [Thornton, 1998].

**JEWELRY STYLES**

Styles were exceptionally varied in the last decade, ranging from conservative traditional jewelry to sleek, ultramodern designs to one-of-a-kind pieces by contemporary artist-jewelers. Antique and estate jewelry was also in strong demand. The exceptional popularity of estate-style jewelry prompted many jewelers to produce replicas to make the look available to every level of buyer. Designs from the early 20th century—platinum, diamond, and pearl pieces inspired by the garland style, for example, or plique-a-jour enameled pieces designed to imitate Art Nouveau jewels—were especially prevalent.

**Texture Talks.** There was a strong interest in jewelry with the look of fabric in the ’90s. Metal was woven, braided, or fashioned into interlocking mesh and accented by diamonds, pearls, or colored gems. Jewelry by Christian Tse, among others, exemplifies this, in gem-studded mesh collars, chokers, and bracelets (figure 24). Woven metal also achieved the fabric look in jewelry by such artists as Arline Fisch, Barbara Berk, and Mary Lee Hu. Using wire or narrow strips of 18K or 22K gold, these jewelers produced tight patterns and curving volutes of woven metal [again, see figure 18].

Metal was also given surface textures to mimic the appearance of satin or woven ribbon. While this technique has been a standard practice in recent decades for such jewelry luminaries as Buccellati and Henry Dunay, a greater number of jewelers picked up the trend and expanded on it in various ways. The surfaces of some high-karat gold bracelets and earrings by Lina Fanourakis, for example, appear identical to that of a finely ribbed grosgrain ribbon. Other jewelers, such as Alex Sepkus and Paul Lantuch, are known for their elaborate, hand-engraved surface textures. Some jewels by Sepkus have the look of braided or woven ribbons of gold accented by small diamonds and colored stones, while others have the rich complexity of an intricate tapestry. Lantuch’s jewelry is reminiscent of Renaissance gold work, with superbly carved scrollwork and mannerist images from the 16th century. A loupe is needed to properly admire the exquisite detail on pieces by these artists.

**Pavé.** Pavé work appeared everywhere in jewelry of the 1990s. Links in bracelets and chain necklaces—and even the shanks and prongs of rings—were pavéed with diamonds. Some designers also used colored gems extensively in their pavé work (again, see figure 20). In a style unique to this decade, different gems of similar color were used in combination with each other. For example, rubies, red spinels, and rubellites of the same size, cut, and color tone might be used to completely cover the surface of a jewel. Similarly, blue gems—such as tanzanites, iolites, and sapphires—or green gems—such as tsavorites, demantoids, tourmalines, and emeralds—would be used to fill fields in a design. In variations on this theme, these gems might be set so they shaded from light to dark tones or from one hue to
another. Pioneered by J.A.R. at the start of the decade, this style was adopted by a number of designers, including Marilyn Cooperman, Delle Valle, James de Givenchy, E.S.G., Martin Katz, and Michelle Ong (figure 25). Occasionally, the gems would be set with the pavilion up and the crown down for a distinctive look.

**Trompe l'Oeil.** New to the ‘90s was the “trompe l’oeil” effect of overlaid gems seen in the work of Michael Zobel of Germany and British designer Stephen Webster. Jewelry by Zobel features yellow diamonds set in platinum or rose gold, all of which is covered by a thin sheet of amber or mother-of-pearl that allows the diamonds to glisten through [figure 26]. Webster’s method is to set carved rock crystal saddles or cabochons on top of a flat slab of tiger’s-eye, chrysoprase, lapis lazuli, jade, or opal to give the finished composite jewel a soft, illusive color effect [figure 27].

**Jewelry Motifs.** Motifs during the decade fell into several groups. There were simple, blocky-style hearts, stars, moons, crosses, cylinders, cubes, and teardrops—minimal and solid with rounded or beveled edges. These were either pavéed or scatter-set with gems. Some were inlaid with onyx, turquoise, mother-of-pearl, or coral. In representations of the natural world, there was particular emphasis on endangered or exotic species, including the elephant, rhinoceros, panda, giraffe, panther, tiger, alligator, whale, and seal. Although hardly endangered, the lowly snail appeared frequently in precious form, while jeweled butterflies, bees, turtles, fish, and frogs were as prolific as ever. Companies such as Cartier, Graff, and Bulgari made a variety of jewels in this vein. Flora as well as fauna thrived in jewelry designs. Delicate flowers such as lilies, orchids, and camelias were especially popular in both stylized and actual representations [Flores-Vianna, 1998]. Natural figures in jewelry were predominantly fashioned in metal set with pavé diamonds, but they also frequently incorporated baroque-shaped cultured pearls or carved gems with colored gem or enameled accents.

Crosses and crowns were featured in a number of popular styles, notably by such designers as Cynthia Bach and Erica Courtney among many others. Ribbon and bow motifs extended the fabric look popular in the ‘90s, while the appearance of jeweled baby shoes and pacifiers was one indication of the huge baby boom among young professionals.

Necklace styles ranged from close-fitting chokers to chains 16 to 24 inches (40 to 61 cm) in length. Big gold-link necklaces or flexible gem-set collars—which fit close around the base of the neck—were “must-have” items at the start of the decade. They were eclipsed somewhat in the late ‘90s by minimalist pendants and lavalieres that accentuated a long, lean look. Gem-set chains and gem-bead necklaces became more popular as the decade pro-

![Figure 25. Multi-gem pavé jewelry was introduced in the ‘90s and became very fashionable. Different gems of like color and size were pavé set in one of three ways: to completely cover a jewel, to fill different areas with contrasting color, or to provide gradations from one hue to another. These leaf earrings, designed by Michelle Ong of multi-gem pavé in platinum and blackened silver, are perfect illustrations of this style. The gems used are fancy brown and yellow diamonds, blue and pink sapphires, rubies, emeralds, and amethyst, accented by near-colorless diamonds. Courtesy of Michelle Ong for Carnet, Hong Kong; photo © Tino Hammid.](image-url)
gressed, while pearls of every type were omnipresent in every style. The fashionable “Y-necklace” that captured the market in 1996 was passé by 1997, replaced by the lariat—a long, open-ended chain fastened with a gem-set slide-clasp or tied loosely around the neck to show gem-set terminations [Morreale, 1997].

Set with diamonds or colored gems, line bracelets, also known as “tennis” bracelets, continued to be popular in the ’90s. An endless variety of flexible link bracelets of all widths were in vogue, particularly with diamonds pavaéd on alternate links. Big cuff bracelets were also popular, both rigid and in flexible mesh. C-shaped, penannular bangles, with gem-set terminals worn to show at the top of the wrist, were also a ’90s trend; they were seen particularly in jewelry designs by Steven Lagos and David Yurman (again, see figure 19).

In general, rings were large and designed to “stand out in a crowd” (see again figure 12). The antique look of pierced platinum with hand-engraved details was strongly favored for engagement rings, while a channel-set or invisibly set shank surrounding a large center stone was a more dazzling modern style, and ultramodern tension-set or Mystère-set diamonds were at the vanguard. Colored gem rings tended to be big, bold, and richly set with gems in strong color combinations. J.F.A. (Jean-François Albert) came out with his Signature Fit shank for large gem-set rings that can be adjusted to fit different finger sizes. Domed rings set with individual square cabochons or individual pearls in a gold grid—for a quilted appearance—extended the fabric look to rings. Large center gems were set in chunky metal rings and worn on the index finger for a power look. Some of the most avant-garde rings of the ’90s were carved from a gem material such as quartz or chalcedony and then set with a different gemstone [Koivula and Kammerling, 1991]. Although this has historic precedent in rings from the Mughal period in India and from the 1920s in Western Europe, the ’90s rings have a raw power that is at once barbaric and futuristic.

Earrings shifted in fashion from large, close-fitting clips as the decade opened—to long pendants by the time it closed [figure 28]. Diamond stud earrings were ubiquitous, growing larger in carat size as the decade wore on. Single baroque-shaped black or “cream”-colored cultured pearls were ideal for drops at the end of a simple shepherd’s-hook ear wire. Large, single, round cultured pearls of good color
and luster, set with a single bezel-set diamond of a half-carat or more, also were fashionable. Earrings were often “unmatched”: fabricated so that the design was the same for both but the gems were opposite. For example, one earring might contain a black pearl top with white pearl drop, while the other has a white pearl top with black pearl drop. Both men and women wore earrings during the ’90s, with many sporting more than one earring in each ear, although this was generally a radical fashion statement that had abated somewhat as the decade came to a close.

Impact of Competitions. Jewelry design competitions played an important role in the promotion of diamonds, pearls, and colored stones during this decade. The Diamonds International awards hosted by De Beers, and the Pearl competitions hosted by the Cultured Pearl Association, are venerable among international competitions. Others are regional, including the Swiss Prix Golay Buchel and the North American Spectrum awards hosted by AGTA. The heightened exposure that these competitions gave to jewelry from each of these regions inspired additional contests in the ’90s, including the above-mentioned AGTA Cutting Edge awards for innovation and excellence in gem cutting, the Platinum Guild International’s Platinum Passion awards to inspire designs in platinum, the World Gold Council’s Gold Virtuosi awards to honor designs in gold, and the Women’s Jewelry Association Diva award to promote jewelry designed by women. Photo spreads featuring the winning pieces are given much play in the trade press, and the pieces themselves are put on exhibit—often at a number of different venues. This exposure has helped advance the use of colored gems in fine jewelry and the proliferation of pearls, as well as expanded the popularity of diamonds and platinum.

Auction Trends. Traditionally, auction houses were the venue for the sale of ancient, antique, and previously owned estate jewelry to a narrow group of antique- and estate-jewelry dealers and collectors. During the 1990s, however, there was a gradual shift in both the type of buyer at an auction and the type of jewelry sold there. Sotheby’s sale of the Duchess of Windsor’s jewelry in 1987 brought jewelry auctions into the limelight and heightened public awareness of auctions as a source of fine jewelry. Other highly publicized estate auctions fanned the flames, and soon wealthy buyers from the public sector began to outbid estate jewelers for these pieces (Dick, 1990b). This new trend was a double-edged sword: While it focused public attention on antique and estate jewelry, thereby escalating prices and demand, most estate-jewelry dealers were unable to pay the higher prices at auction and still make a profit in resale. As a result, there were more buyers from the private sector but fewer estate-jewelry dealers bought pieces at auction. Meanwhile, manufacturers of contemporary jewelry, seeing a ready market that they could exploit, began to discreetly place newly fabricated jewelry in the auction sales. For expensive, high-end pieces by new designers, auction houses provided access to a much wider clientele of wealthy buyers. They also brought new designers immediate international exposure, a visibility that would otherwise be difficult and expensive to achieve in the intensely competitive ’90s market. As a result, a number of contemporary designers, including Della Valle,
Michelle Ong, and Lynn Nakamura, are beginning to build international followings through the auction market. Symbiotically, auction houses are benefiting by showcasing a select group of contemporary jewelry artists and designers (Christie’s, 2000; Sotheby’s, 2000).

MARKETING AND THE MEDIA
Marketing was of paramount importance for designers in this highly competitive decade. The best way for them to become known was to advertise their designs so that the consumer would immediately connect their name with a particular style. Branding became a trend at every level of the industry: Argyle “champagne” diamonds, the Lazare Diamond, Cartier and Tiffany & Co. jewelry, and individual designers such as Henry Dunay and David Yurman. As if the competition wasn’t fierce enough, fashion couturiers such as Chanel, Versace, Fendi, Gucci, and Escada also came out with lines of fine jewelry. While this latter development put greater pressure on jewelers to compete for market share, it also tied jewelry into the clothing fashion scene, building a greater awareness of contemporary styles for jewelry among the wealthy followers of couture fashion.

With the growing importance of movies and television, and the proliferation of print media, jewelry trends became instantly accessible to everyone. This immediacy of information has had a homogenizing effect in many ways, making certain looks and styles generic worldwide. The power of Hollywood had to be recognized, as jewelry worn by actresses on television and in movies immediately set trends for the greater public. The “Y” necklace, popularized by various TV series such as Friends, is a case in point, as is the pearl floater necklace by Wendy Brugode that actress Rene Russo wore in the films Tin Cup and Ransom (Morreale, 1997). Pearls spaced two to three inches apart on fine silk cord or monofilament became a huge success for Brigode and such companies as Honora.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Annual Awards ceremony has become a huge opportunity for jewelers, as the movie stars who attend get extraordinary media coverage through live television on the night of the event and subsequently in print by such publications as InStyle, Movieline, and People. Harry Winston, Fred Leighton, David Orgell, and Martin Katz are some of the prominent jewelers who have loaned jewelry for stars to wear on Oscar night. Others design pieces for their clients for such a special event, as Cynthia Bach did for Cate Blanchett on Academy Awards night in 1999.

Television shopping networks and the Internet have also brought a wide selection of jewelry directly to the masses. Buying jewelry and gemstones has never been easier. With a simple telephone call or the click of a mouse, items shown in photographic detail can be purchased instantly. Home Shopping Network and QVC were two of the first television marketing networks where jewelry could be purchased with a phone call. They combined their jewelry displays with information about the gem materials used, which raised public awareness of the wide
A variety of colored gems. Although most of what was initially offered was on the low end of the value scale, the jewelry world could hardly ignore the tremendous marketing potential of these venues.

In the late 1990s, jewelers at every level scrambled to put a Web site on the Internet and make a bid for the online consumer [Haley, 1996]. By late 2000, however, two of the most prominent sites had folded, and several more were reputed to have only a few months’ financial viability left [D. Hiss-Odell, pers. comm., 2000]. The Internet is a new frontier for the jewelry world, with inherent opportunities and risks. Aware of the potential, however, many jewelry companies are willing to gamble on a dot-com Internet business in the hopes of striking it rich. At this point, the Web sites vary widely in what they offer and how they make their services available to the public. Much like the false-fronts on the boomtown shacks of America’s Wild West a century ago, some Web sites are nothing more than an advertisement with a phone and a fax number. Others, by comparison, are sophisticated promotional and informational venues with multiple layers that can be explored with deft application of a computer mouse.

CONCLUSION
Defining jewelry trends of the 1990s could be compared to defining the continually shifting shapes in a kaleidoscope. This was a decade packed with change. New, often unusual cuts for diamonds and colored gems proliferated, expanding the possibilities for jewelry design, which took off in every direction. Designers used new juxtapositions of colored gems set in a wide range of metals, from platinum to 24K gold to titanium. Gold and white metals vied for pride of place in the marketplace, while diamonds and colored gems in pavé, flush, invisible, and tension settings gave ’90s jewelry a variety of distinctive looks. As the sources for cultured pearls expanded, so did their impact on the market. And the marketplace itself expanded to include television and the Internet, which have had a profound influence, while jewelry branding became the best way to get consumer attention.

Looking ahead, this is an intensely exciting time for the jewelry industry, with many burgeoning opportunities and creativity at every level. Doubtless, the tremendous advances in the ’90s will have a decided impact on jewelry design, manufacture, marketing, and wear in the decade to come.

REFERENCES

Key to abbreviations: American Jewelry Manufacturers = AJM; Gems & Gemology = G&G (Gem News = GN); jewelers’ Circular Keystone = JCK; Modern Jeweler = MJ.