

Tiny diamonds spark two worlds of design



By Ettagale Blauer

Like tiny stars sparkling in the night-time sky, small diamonds attract attention far beyond their size. For jewelry designers, they spark a million ideas, each as different as the mind that nurtures it. Sometimes the idea is generated by the environment; sometimes it is nourished by customers themselves. It may be a comment, a gesture, or a glance out the window. If you live in the woods, you're going to be inspired by leaves and forest creatures. If you live at the seashore, you may find yourself drawing sea shell designs. If you're married to a weaver, you weave golden wires into designs.

Cultures and traditions also play their role. Korean ancestry leads to the use of ancient Korean techniques. The moors of Scotland are translated into heather motifs. With jewelry designers the stories are always there, just waiting to be told.

Small diamonds have found their ways into two opposite worlds of design, one organic, the other geometric. Each is beautiful, well designed and exquisitely executed. Each appeals to a different customer. This is the joy of jewelry design. These tiny works of art give women reasons to come back to the retail jewelry store or jewelry gallery. They lift diamonds out of the category of commodities, into personal expression.

When you live in Australia, dealing in South Sea pearls, with the sea all around you, it's almost inevitable that you will start thinking about designing jewelry that evokes sea creatures. Italian-born Rosario Autore, founder of the Autore pearl company, began working with pearl farms in Australia in 1991. Today, the firm distributes more than 600,000 South Sea pearls around the world and is one of the largest such firms. Its pearls are sourced from seven South Sea pearl producers.

The farms are situated in the crystal clear waters off the coast of northwest Western Australia, and the Northern Territory as well as the Islands of Indonesia. In these superb, clean waters, mollusks produce pearls in myriad natural colors including blue, silver, soft pink, cream, yellow and gold.

While most of these pearls find their way into strands, or

LEFT: From Autore's Oceania collection comes a jeweled crab in white and rose gold, set with a South Sea pearl, blue and purple sapphires, green tourmaline and amethysts.

CENTER: Designer Elena Kriegner creates geometric jackets in white or yellow gold, topped with an aquamarine or an amethyst, embracing a customer's diamond band.

RIGHT: Autore's Oceania snail brooch includes white and yellow diamonds, blue sapphires, and a baroque South Sea pearl.

al jewelry designs, d by diamonds ored gemstones, l number now heir way into a g collection called, riately, Oceania. one can envision ing among the res of the Great Reef. Actually a x of coral reefs, the arrier Reef forms a breakwater in the ea, off the coast of sland, North East ia.

t this astonishing al formation, cted as a World age Area, comes spiration for the ion. Most start out ne baroque pearl. e pearls suggest a eature; some are arly the creature it s; the designer has o do but place it on l branch, surround white and colored onds, and colored tones, and give it ne. Others offer a ng point, but one equires the richest imagination of the designer.

you swim along in this remarkable natural aquarium, ere are some of the bejeweled creatures coming from re. There's an octopus on "legs" that are keshi pearls. nond tentacles wrap around the keshi. There's a sea snail ed from a long baroque pearls, set with white and black onds, pink sapphire and apatite. A school of fish swims ach with its own baroque pearl body and colorful, gem- ail or fins. An angelfish waves its movable tail made up raiba tourmaline, blue moonstone, sapphires of orange, and purple, and dramatically enhanced with black and e diamonds.

hile some of these creatures seem as fanciful as those in cartoons, anyone who has snorkeled in warm waters recognize the astonishing variety of shapes and colors he sea creatures. Nature is so remarkable and equally arkable are the jeweled interpretations that come from



The Queen of Atlantis bib is the stunning centerpiece of Autore's Oceania collection. It features South sea pearls, keshi, blue sapphire, tsavorite garnet, Paraiba tourmaline, green aquamarine, and diamonds, and breaks up into 32 pieces of jewelry.

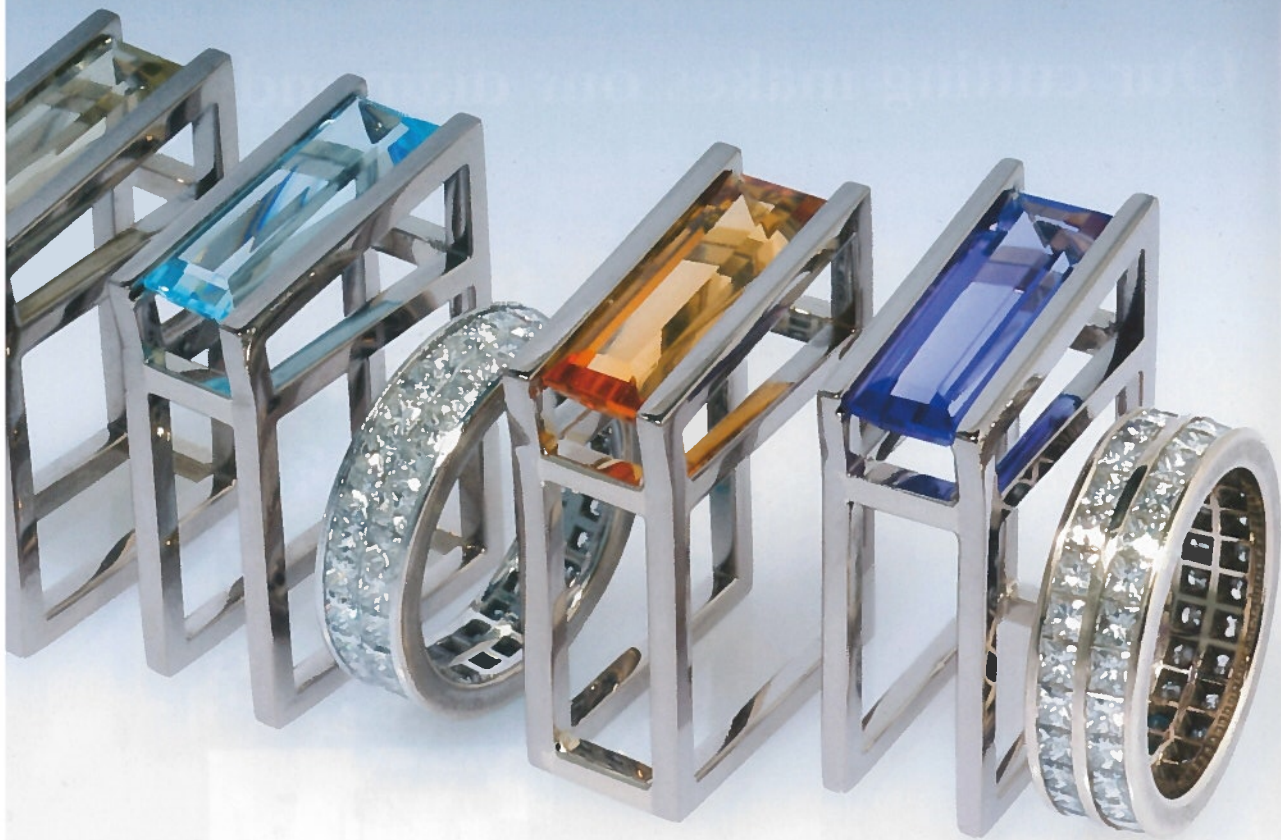
Autore. Of course no crab is quite as stunning as one made of white and rose gold, a center South Sea baroque pearl, blue and purple sapphires, green tourmaline, amethyst and diamond.

The tour de force of the collection is the Queen of Atlantis bib. This huge piece, is designed as lacy, branching tendrils, all outlined with small diamonds. Cultured baroque pearls in varying shades of white and grey, nearly to black, are linked and twined, and highlighted by blue sapphire, Paraiba tourmaline, green tourmaline and tsavorite. The whole structure is suspended from diamond-set hoops interspersed among a strand of beautifully matched baroque pearls. Not only is this piece remarkable as a whole, it then breaks down into 32 separate pieces of jewelry. Each of the little diamond 'coral' clips comes off to be worn

as enhancers. Sections of the lacy bib itself become brooches and pendants. The entire piece, in white gold, with black rhodium plating along the lower branches, retails for a cool half million dollars.

Elena Kriegner also grew up in the natural world, far away from any ocean. She grew up in Winklpoint, a village of just 10 families that was tucked away in a remote part of Austria. All she knew from her daily experience was the life of the farmers, their cows, and her mother's work as a dressmaker. No one can explain how, then, at the age of six, she could announce that she wanted to become a jewelry maker, or how at the age of 10, she began designing jewelry.

Though her mother wanted her to become something practical, like a carpenter, she was determined. After attending primary school in Neukirchen, far from home, she had to make a life decision: would she go to work for a



of Elena Kriegner's "Uber" collection in which gold frames, each set with a colored gemstone, slide over diamond bands of equal width. The rings are custom made.

any or attend a school to learn jewelry making. She left the school and for the next four years, put in 42-weeks, 20 of them at the bench, graduating with her diploma as a jeweler. Another two years of schooling gained her a master's degree in goldsmithing.

At 21, remarkably, she returned home to set up her own business, in that village of 10 houses. "My mother said I should open a workshop in the house." Her school friends became her first clients and in a short time, word of mouth was sending her a steady stream of clients. "I made sure my niece could be worn in many ways because my friends were my age, they had little money. I would think about what would work for them so they would have the most bang for their money. A ring becomes a pendant, or you could use the stones for a different look. I always liked the practical part." The moving parts were irresistible both to the wearers and the people they showed them to. A month stay in South Africa working for a gemstone dealer gave her the lapidary skills she would call on later in her career.

At 14 years, she worked out of the house, always making one-of-a-kind jewels. In 2002, she left on another remarkable life journey, sailing with her boyfriend across the Atlantic in a 32-foot catamaran. More sailing brought

them up the east coast of the United States. With time out for several major journeys to Panama, she has remained in port, in New York City, where she has perfected a ring design that speaks to modern women.

The design begins with a woman's diamond-set band. "So many women are divorced but don't want to give up their diamond bands," she says. She created a frame to fit around the band, with a transparent gemstone on top. It softens the look of the band while allowing some of the sparkle to shine through. The gemstones she uses are usually rectangular in shape, filling the space between the two rigid sections of the ring's frame. The diamond ring slips in easily and then is held in place by the wearer's finger. The frame, or jacket, may be worn on its own, of course, but comes more fully to life when it is embracing the diamond band. Not everyone who buys the frame is divorced but after many years of marriage, many women like the idea of dressing up the diamond-set band.

Now Kriegner has begun to sell her work through a limited number of jewelry retailers but the work is still mainly done on a custom basis. The retailer shows one of her designs; then the customer's own ring is fitted with a custom-made frame. From two different parts of the world, these two very different jewelry looks cater to today's diverse jewelry clientele. ♦