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JEWELRY MASTERS

- MARYA DABROWSKI
- FALCHER FUSAGER
- MICHAEL GOOD
- BARBARA HEINRICH
- MAIJA NEIMANIS
- GEORGE SAWYER





DESERVING
OF THEIR
LAURELS

They are the essentials,

the singular voices that stake out unique territories in the crowded, and sometimes confusing, world of contemporary jewelry design. They are the artists who have developed entirely new ways of approaching the basic building blocks of jewelry, materials that are available to all craftspeople. In an era of fads, knockoffs, cheap imports and just plain fakes, they stand out as pioneers whose individuality has stood the test of time. It can be tempting to follow trends, to play it safe, to set stones in basic mountings, to make pieces that suit the fashions of the day. Yet these jewelers don't follow trends; they create them.

THESE JEWELRY PIONEERS STAND OUT AS UNIQUE IN THEIR WORLD—THEY LEAD, NOT FOLLOW

BY ETTAGALE BLAUER

Jewelry occupies a unique place in the world of art and ornament. It is at once precious and personal. It is sculpture to wear, the designer's name as easily identifiable by those in the know as a car grille is to an automotive aficionado. But the inherent value of its raw materials sets jewelry apart from the other crafts. While other artists use wood, leather, fiber, glass and base metals to make their

statements, jewelers create with precious gold, platinum, silver and gemstones that may cost as much as a car.

Rather than be intimidated by the value of these materials, or by the dictates of fashion gurus, these jewelry artists are among a small group who have forged their own paths and became leaders in their respective parts of the industry. In doing so, they have spawned virtual mini-industries of followers and imitators. Yet every year they continue refining and inventing, exploring and expanding their themes and techniques.

Fresh designs by innovative artists: an 18kt gold-and-diamond interlocking bracelet by Barbara Heinrich, and gold earrings by Michael Good.

TIM CALLAHAN





Using an anticlastic raising technique, Michael Good creates flexible bracelets (above) and other jewelry that doesn't need catches or clutches. His experience as a sculptor shows in works like this swirl ring with a spirit sun diamond.

MICHAEL GOOD

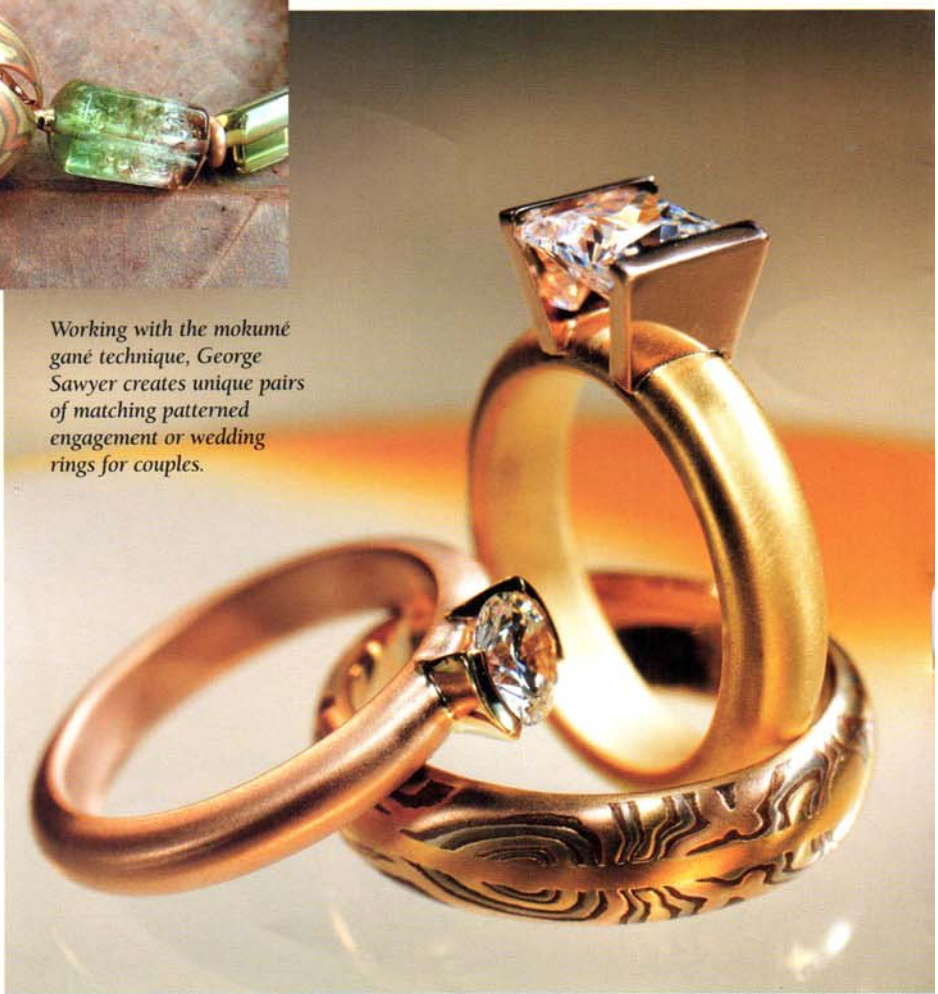
One mark of a jewelry pioneer is the introduction of a technique into our jewelry vocabulary. Who ever heard of anticlastic raising before Michael Good adapted this labor-intensive technique and created a line of remarkable gold jewelry? Although it sounds simple—you just create a template from a flat sheet of gold and then hammer it until the gold bends and folds to fit your design—it is one of the most amazing techniques to come along in the 5,000 years of goldsmithing. Creating gold jewelry that needs no findings—those little catches and clutches that snap at your fingernails—is just one of the delights of this work. Through more than 20 years of design and technical innovation, Good has constantly expanded his line, and his generous teaching of the technique has spawned a sub-industry of jewelers.



GEORGE SAWYER

When mokumé gané—the sandwiching of metals—became one of the studio jeweler's tools, it was the next new thing. But like titanium and other "here today, gone tomorrow" techniques, most of the early experimenters gave it up for less demanding and more easily understood work. Not so with George Sawyer, who brought with him a new level of sophistication and precision, and is known now for his elegant and subtle wedding ring line. Working with yellow, red, gray and green golds, he swirls the metal in sinuous curves and designs, making it look as easy as twisting vanilla and chocolate together in a soft-ice cream cone.

Working with the mokumé gané technique, George Sawyer creates unique pairs of matching patterned engagement or wedding rings for couples.





Marya Dabrowski mixes gold with diamonds, aquamarine and other gemstones to create colorful necklaces, earrings and bracelets.



MARYA DABROWSKI

Colored gemstone beads have become all the rage. They're pretty, they're colorful, they can be mixed in infinite ways and, it appears, virtually anyone can string them. And then there's the gemstone bead jewelry of Marya Dabrowski. Just as a palette of paint is only a range of colors until it meets the hand of an artist, so it is with gemstone beads. Dabrowski has evolved a method of bunching and joining the beads that many imitate but never duplicate. That secret, along with her ability to seek out and combine myriad gemstone species, sets her work above the mountain of bead jewelry on the market.

MAIJA NEIMANIS

Granulation, the art of placing tiny gold granules on a gold surface, was considered a "lost" technique until it was revived by Bob Kulicke and Jean Stark. Their school, now called the Jewelry Arts Institute, teaches the technique to anyone with the patience of a saint. This has spawned a sea of competent but boring attempts to evoke the jewels of antiquity. Fortunately, a few designers found ways to design jewelry embellished with granulation that made the most of this demanding technique. Maija Neimanis has combined this very precise technique with a flamboyant and original sense of style. Her designs are opulent, full-bodied and totally contemporary.



Maija Neimanis not only emphasizes geometric design in new works such as this ring, she pursues it further in the painstaking placement of polished mini diamonds on 22kt gold in her pendant and earrings.



Falcher Fusager applies and fires layers of enamel to gold to create colorful pendants, rings and other jewelry.

FALCHER FUSAGER

One of the earliest and most difficult goldsmithing techniques is cloisonné enameling. It's a way of painting metal with color that requires absolute control as well as the ability to think ahead, like a chess player. Patiently, the artist builds up layer upon layer of color, firing the piece in a kiln again and again.

Determining where the color goes, how much color to use, and how to combine various tones is what makes jeweler Falcher Fusager's work a tour de force. Brilliant cloisonné colors and bold, contemporary designs are the hallmarks of his work. Cloisonné, like granulation, is an ancient technique that is taught extensively, yet very few jewelers find a way to express individual artistry with it. When Fusager named his company Magick, he was just stating the obvious. Who else but a magician could conjure up such work?

BARBARA HEINRICH

When Barbara Heinrich shows a piece of her textured gold jewelry, there's no need for her to sign her name; the surface treatment is signature enough. Her Milky Way brooches take a theme and reinterpret it in different ways until she has said everything there is to say. Once one of Heinrich's series is finished, there is no going back. She moves on to another idea, always expressed within her design aesthetic. The diamonds are set with such subtlety, they seem to have simply arrived on the metal of their own volition. Her neck pieces of interlocking gold segments are the Rubik's Cube of jewelry making.



TIM CALLAHAN

Barbara Heinrich is known for her subtle use of small diamonds with gold in Milky Way designs like this hand-fabricated cuff (above), and signature leaf motifs, such as this 18kt gold bracelet.

These, then, are some of the essentials, the jewelers who have raised contemporary jewelry design to a breathtakingly high level. Their work is collected and treasured by a knowledgeable group of connoisseurs. This work truly honors goldsmithing's 5,000-year tradition. ■

Ettagale Blauer is the author of Contemporary American Jewelry Design and has been cited for her coverage of the craft jewelry field by the Contemporary Design Group and the American Jewelry Designer Guild.

ETTAGALE BLAUER

From the moment I first set eyes on contemporary jewelry I knew there was a world waiting to be discovered. Thriving in the most beautiful and often remote parts of America, the contemporary jewelry movement was making its first serious steps toward commercial feasibility. It has been my joy and pleasure to report on the contemporary jewelry movement – not only because I admire the esthetic and technical aspects of the work but because the people involved are a delight to know. I continue to be impressed by the talent, ingenuity and dedication contemporary goldsmiths bring to their work. They are a never-ending source of inspiration to me.

Selected works:

African Elegance, published by Rizzoli USA.

Contemporary American Jewelry Design, published by Chapman and Hall.

American Wristwatches, Five Decades of Style and Design, published by Schiffer.

Author of hundreds of articles on jewelry for *New York Diamonds*, *Lapidary Journal*, *Art & Auction*, *Ornament*, *Niche*, *Jewelers-Circular Keystone*, *Rapaport Report*, *Cigar Aficionado*

Born: New York City
Education: Bachelor of Arts degree from Hunter College, New York City

1998 Received Benne Award from American Jewelry Design Council for achievement in editorial coverage of contemporary jewelry movement (named for 16th century goldsmith Benvenuto Cellini)

2004 Received Designer Advocate Award from Contemporary Jewelry Design Group

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

