

ROYAL JEWELS

Fascinated by gems

Prince Dimitri of Yugoslavia, who grew up surrounded by opulence, now designs for all pocketbooks

BY KATHLEEN BECKETT

Prince Dimitri of Yugoslavia has a notable pedigree. His lineage, which includes Catherine the Great, also encompasses the deposed royal families of Italy, Russia and Greece — and his mother is Princess Maria Pia of Bourbon-Parma, known for her fabulous collection of emeralds.

"I would see her getting ready to go out," the prince recalled, "wearing her jewelry, especially her emeralds. They were beautiful."

Thanks to those early visions, he said, "I've always been fascinated by gems."

The prince, 63, now lives in New York City. His apartment, between exclusive Sutton Place and Beekman Place, is filled with family photographs of elegant women in gowns and tiaras. It is not surprising that Dimitri — as he prefers to call himself rather than using Karageorgevich or other transliterated versions of the family name — would be inspired to design jewelry. "Gems are my No. 1 passion," he said.

Initially, however, he earned a business law degree from the University of Paris and after moving to New York in 1983, worked for the brokerage firm EF Hutton.

Then he could no longer resist. He studied at the Gemological Institute of America and began working in the jewelry department at Sotheby's, rising to senior vice president in charge of all jewelry auctions. In 2002, after 15 years at Sotheby's, he moved to the New York office of what was then Phillips, de Pury & Luxembourg, an auction house where he was head of the jewelry department.

"After 20 years working in auctions," he said, "I know what's out there, and I know what's not out there." And so he was poised to fill a gap or two.

In 1999 he debuted a collection of cuff links, which demonstrated his design aesthetic. "The stones speak to me," he said. "I hold a stone and think, 'What am I going to do with it?'"

In this case, he decided the gems did not want mountings. So he had his workshop drill a tiny hole in the center of each citrine, peridot or amethyst so a post could hold the gem to the cuff link, leaving the stone's edges and back free.

Today he uses the same approach for his signature Lazy Ring: A chunky gem, like an amethyst, is attached to the ring through a center hole, but otherwise the stone can move from side to side.

"It rolls on your finger," Dimitri said.



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"It's super glamorous. It reminds you to be in the present moment," one of the principles of Buddhism, which the prince has studied (he meditates every day.) The ring also includes "two little diamonds hiding in the back. Whimsy is chic."

What also is chic: mixing high and low. "My mother had a sandalwood and gold bracelet by Cartier," Dimitri recalled, and it inspired him to use wood in his designs, creating, for instance, bird's-eye maple earrings inset with spinels.

The prince and his business partner, Todd Morley, founded Prince Dimitri Jewelry in 2007, and it quickly became popular among the social set.

"I met him years ago through our mutual friend Carolina Herrera, right after he opened his atelier on 57th Street," Ju-

dith Price, president of the nonprofit National Jewelry Institute, wrote in an email. "At that time you could buy his creations or bring stones for the design of bespoke pieces."

"Dimitri remains a darling for haute joaillerie of the fashionable ladies who lunch," she said, adding, "His more affordable bijoux still express that sense of classic style. In spite of his title and circle of famous clients, Dimitri is both charming and down to earth."

Although known mostly for creating the sort of opulent jewelry his ancestors might have worn — his Masterpiece collection, which ranges from \$150,000 to \$1.2 million — a few years ago Dimitri started to produce lower-priced lines. They often are inspired by his love of history, decorative arts and various cultures, as the stacks of books sharing

space with family photographs on the tops of antique side tables in his living room attests.

"I love Damascus steel, which was used in the swords of the crusaders during the Middle Ages," he said, so he used it for series of crosses. The knot of Savoy, "a symbol of true love," is another motif that appears in slender gold bracelets and earrings, while the paisley of India influenced the gracefully curved outline of a pendant.

The designer named the collections with the shared wording The New Look of, followed by Chic, Love, Cool and Glamour. Pieces range from \$190 to \$20,000. (Neiman Marcus is selling a number of the New Look pieces, featured in its 2021 Christmas catalog.)

Luca Lo Sicco became a fan after seeing a tiara that Dimitri had created in an exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. A professor at Savannah College of Art and Design at the time, he invited Dimitri to visit the school for a week in 2017 to mentor students in fashion marketing and management.

"He shared his knowledge of the managerial process," he said. "He was so kind and nice."

And so Dimitri was invited to return the following year. "For the jewelry department, we did a project on luxury jewelry," Dr. Lo Sicco said. "We selected three companies: Verdura, Bulgari and Prince Dimitri. The students who chose him as a company worked on a hypothetical approach, which Dimitri took on board."

The students redesigned his website, adding e-commerce and featuring the New Look lines to "show I can design in every price point," Dimitri said.

The website also sells his book, "Once Upon a Diamond: A Family Tradition of Royal Jewels," written with Lavinia Branca Snyder. Published by Rizzoli in 2020, the book has a foreword by Ms. Herrera and an introduction by François Curjel, Christie's chairman for Europe. The book, sold by Neiman Marcus and other outlets, is in a second printing.

"He's been kind of a secret name, a cult classic," said Marion Fasel, founder of the jewelry website the Adventurine. "It's time for this underground name to be well-known. Maybe now that he's put his whole story together in a book, he's ready for a new chapter."

But lest anyone forget his roots, the Prince Dimitri logo features a crown.

Lineage

Clockwise from upper left, a medieval-style cross in 20-karat yellow gold and oxidized bronze; the designer Prince Dimitri of Yugoslavia; his book "Once Upon a Diamond: A Family Tradition of Royal Jewels"; and a Tutti Frutti dress set.

BLING

Sapphires: pink and trendy

From royalty to rockers, the glitterati are going for pieces fashioned from this multi-hued gem that is less costly than a diamond

BY MELANIE ABRAMS

When Princess Eugenie of Britain unveiled her pink-orange padparadscha engagement ring in early 2018, neither she nor her then-fiance, Jack Brooksbank — who said he chose the oval gem — could have anticipated the craze for pinkish sapphires today.

Not that the princess's ring was the primary factor. There is a passion for pink in fashion; in politics, with a pussy hat from the 2017 Women's March now in the Smithsonian; and in diamonds, like the 10-carat pink diamond that the rapper Lil Uzi Vert had implanted in his forehead — and then removed — earlier this year.

The beauty of the pink sapphire is rooted in the stone's hardness, which "is second to diamond," said Joanna Hardy, author of "Sapphire: A Celebration of Colour," published this fall by Thames & Hudson in association with Violette Editions and Gemfields. And, "the luster is really, really good. You can get sharp facet edges and therefore that really helps to bring out the color."

Selim Mouzannar, the Beirut jeweler who created a one-of-a-kind white gold cuff set with pink sapphires and tsavorites (\$68,640) among other pieces this season, described the pink sapphire as "soft, silky, bright pink."

"When the pink sapphire crystal reflects the light, you receive to your eyes something special," he said — and the color changes as the gem is seen from different angles.

It is the kind of appeal that prompted Siobhan Bell, 32, an international D.J. and music producer based in Los Angeles, to say she hopes that someday a pink sapphire will be the highlight of her engagement ring. After all, pink is her favorite color and, she said, "sapphires are more exclusive" than diamonds.

Ms. Hardy said most pink sapphires are mined on the islands of Sri Lanka and Madagascar. Sri Lanka's history with the gem (including the famous Ceylon blue version) stretches back thousands of years; its sources include the Bibile mines in the center of the island's eastern region, the Elahera Gem Field in central Sri Lanka and the Pelmadulla mine in the southwest, where padparadscha sapphires are found. (The name padparadscha comes from the Sanskrit word for lotus blossom, whose petals



VAN CLEEF & ARPELS

have the same pink and orange hues as the stone.)

Madagascar actually did not become an important source until 1998, when the gem was discovered in the town of Ilakaka. Now, "you get every color under the sun in Madagascar," Ms. Hardy said, noting that the stones in both countries actually are similar in composition "because back in millions and millions of years ago Madagascar and Sri Lanka were next door to each other."

As for pricing, "when it comes to big sizes, the price is based on many parameters: clarity, luster, size, shape, color," Mr. Mouzannar wrote in a later email, adding that sapphires that have not been heated (to enhance their colors) are more valuable than heated ones.

But generally comparing small gems of less than a carat weight, a pink sapphire is 60 to 75 percent cheaper than a diamond, he said. And "when you go for bigger size, the difference will be higher and can reach 90 percent." Mr. Mouzannar wrote, noting that a two-carat diamond is around \$15,000 compared with \$1,000 for a two-carat pink sapphire.

Yet pink sapphires can be more expensive than emeralds and semi-precious stones. For example: The Los Angeles-based jeweler JupiterGem is

offering an unheated 1.11-carat padparadscha sapphire for \$2,822, a 1.22-carat unheated pink sapphire for \$2,393, a one-carat natural emerald for \$2,173 and a 1.32-carat natural aquamarine, a semiprecious stone, for \$495.

This Christmas season, jewelry offerings are popping with pink.

There is a \$13,300 18-karat rose gold Boghossian necklace with an icicle pendant of pink sapphires "set at every angle, so they appear to melt together as one," according to Net-a-Porter.com. Then there is Alison Lou's heart-shaped pink sapphire stud earrings set in enamel (\$2,450), Anita Ko's rose gold pink sapphire ring that coils around a little finger (\$2,000) and Sydney Evan's pink sapphire beaded bracelet with its enameled and diamond-accented evil eye (\$1,135).

Even the high jewelry collections this year included pink sapphires. Take Dior Joaillerie's Dior Rose collection, which had the gems glittering in the centers of some of its diamond roses. Or Van Cleef & Arpels, which gave its Between the Finger rings some sparkle with a 27.57-carat cushion-cut pink sapphire in its Sous les Étoiles collection.

And large stones are appearing. Case in point: the 23.89-carat cushion-shaped

pink sapphire at the center of Mous-saieff's bejeweled white gold pendant, which went on sale last month. It has been five years since Alisa Mousaieff, the house's chairwoman and owner, bought the stone from a Hong Kong dealer — but now was the time to use it, as "people are asking for pink," she said.

Still, different women have different tastes on pink sapphires.

"The pink sapphire, I mean, that represents to me the pink and love," said Ms. Bell, the D.J. "And I just think, it's an era right now where everyone is trying to be positive and think love thoughts."

For Maddison May Modupe-Ojo, 27, the pink hue reminds her of "the feminine movements that are happening in every area." (But there is a fashionable side, too. To clash with a red dress, Ms. Modupe-Ojo said during an interview last month, she planned to wear a pair of Le Ster 18-karat yellow gold earrings with pink sapphires, diamonds and tourmalines to a book launch and film screening the following night.)

Making jewelry with pink sapphires is more complicated than it seems, said the independent jewelry designer Suzanne Kalan, 63, who is based in Los Angeles and has used the gem since 2009. "We have to make sure we are using

the right shades or, if we have different shades on one ring, then we need to make sure we have all. Usually it's two or three different shades," she said. And Ms. Kalan uses rose gold or yellow gold, rather than white, because "those two colors make the pink pop."

This season, for example, she used showy pear-cut pink sapphires for one-of-a-kind 18-karat rose gold drop earrings with baguette-cut diamonds.

"These stones were shiny and full of life and a beautiful color — not too pale and not very dark, like red," Ms. Kalan said. The London jeweler Diane Kordas, 59, said she places her pink sapphires with precision to direct the design. "I didn't want to have the heaviness on top by the ear," she said of her Rainbow sapphire hoop earrings (£3,083). "I wanted to have it at the bottom so that the eye would draw down so I used the pink more at the top."

While designers generally agree that pink sapphires will continue to be popular, several see other colors threatening pink's dominance.

Ms. Kalan predicted that light blue will be the next sapphire color as "it's not typical," although, she added, it "won't be as big as the pink." Mr. Mouzannar said green sapphires could cut through as, he said, customers are looking for niche jewelry.

And Alicia Wooles, managing director of Holts Gems in London's Hatton Garden, said clients have requested teal sapphires, stones with an unusual blend of blue and green colors. Why? Because "people want to be different," she said.

Oh so bright

From far left: The reversible Antennae necklace, 2021, by Van Cleef & Arpels, is set with 154 pink and mauve Madagascar sapphires, weighing a total 417 carats; Diane Kordas's 18-karat rose gold, sapphire and diamond Love ring; an 18-karat rose gold Boghossian necklace with an icicle pendant of pink sapphires; and Suzanne Kalan's 18-karat rose gold, diamond and sapphire earrings.