

JEWELRY

Italy's Vicenzaoro jewelry show grapples with changing consumer tastes

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Lynn Yaeger on a sustainability panel at Vicenzaoro in January 2019

By [Barbara Palumbo](#)

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VICENZA, Italy – The atmosphere at the Vicenzaoro Jewellery Boutique Show, concluding today in Vicenza, Italy, was as the more recent fairs of the past have been: positive, playful and aesthetically pleasing.

It seems even when the rest of the world is worrying about the future of luxury items such as jewelry, Italy takes its traditionally relaxed approach, focusing more on the country's creativity and lust for life – insert any “Roman Holiday” reference here – and less about the stresses that come with a quickly changing and complex world. This winter edition's theme, fittingly, was “Luxury, Style and Creativity.”

More than sparkle

Vicenzaoro, for those who are unfamiliar, brings a variety of genres of the jewelry industry together under one strategically, albeit slightly separated, roof. There are “halls” – similar to the infamous Baselworld show in Switzerland – which house everything from high-end jewelry brands to machinery used by metalsmiths and bench jewelers to gemstones mined from the far ends of the Earth.

The show also hosts daily seminars and talks covering topics such as, but not limited to, sustainability, ethical sourcing and blockchain: three buzz terms about which today's responsible jewelry brand and reputable retailer care very much. One such panel discussion included the iconic contributor to Vogue magazine, Lynn Yaeger, who scoured the show afterward looking at the latest trends and interesting brands.

New to the fair this year was United States jewelry designer Monica Rich Kosann, who, along with her team, showcased a collection of highly recognizable lockets to a largely international audience.

When asked where she thought the jewelry industry was headed in the near future, Ms. Kosann said, “Right now, if you think about it, we are glued to our phones, and mixing technology into jewelry, like we're doing, could potentially be something that could carry us into the future.”

Vicenza-based jewelry designer Marco Dal Maso, whose collections appear in select Neiman Marcus locations throughout the country, discussed how he intends to think outside the box in both the present and the future as it

pertains to the success of his namesake label.

“My brand is young still, so from here, we will head straight to Paris Fashion Week, which we attend four times per year,” Mr. Del Maso said.

“It’s important to meet up with a variety of people, and there, we’re able to talk with buyers and store owners that sell both fashion items – clothes, shoes, accessories, etc. – as well as jewelry,” he said.

“Having a clear vision of what is going to work in the future needs not only talent, skills and creativity, but also a good amount of investment, which, I believe, most newer designers are looking for.”

Ms. Kosann said she felt that the consumer’s happiness was the key to sustaining a successful jewelry brand, no matter what the future holds.

“From my perspective, jewelry is always in, and the lockets I make are life pieces – not trinkets, but quality pieces of jewelry that are intended to bring joy,” Ms. Kosann said. “I design with the mindset that my pieces need to be timeless while telling their own story.

“Jewelry should hold something that’s meaningful to the woman wearing it,” she said. “From that perspective, women often feel that jewelry is important in their lives, likely now more than ever.

“In this crazy world, my jewelry is happy, and it makes the women who wear it happy, and that’s incredibly important to me.”



Vicenzaoro crowd in Hall 1 at the January 2019 show

Mettle in metal

Vicenzaoro's January edition is the first major jewelry trade fair of the year outside of the **International Exhibition of Haute Horlogerie** watch fair in Geneva, Switzerland, and because of that fact, the eyes of the industry are fixed on Italy come January.

The show has been a leader amongst all the world's jewelry trade fairs when it comes to putting emphasis on responsibility in mining, ethical sourcing and using recycled or green materials. This year's edition did not disappoint in that arena, nor in the overall feel and vibe of the show.

Indeed, the show, held every January and September in Vicenza is not, by any means, a locals-only trade fair. Buyers and journalists alike attend the year's first major jewelry trade fair in a city where jewelry making is not only part of the city's fabric but has become as associated with it as glassmaking is to Murano.

This year's fair played host to an amalgam of exhibitors and jewelry designers, as it usually does, but there were a handful of new faces exhibiting in 2019, including highly acclaimed French jewelry designer Lydia Courteille.

Ms. Courteille's creations are widely considered a mix of art and jewelry. Each collection tells an intricate tale of where the designer has been, what she has experienced along the way, or even, what books she has read and loved in her life.

But when asked about how she planned on future-proofing her company with the concept of the modern buyer changing day to day, she was clear in how she felt she needed to stay relevant to her collectors and clients.

"Since the beginning, when I started to envision my designs, I always looked to what was going to be big in the fashion world," Ms. Courteille said. "I have a strange sense for color and, often, when I use certain colors in my work, I see them soon afterward as colors that are going to be popular in fashion.

"I feel connected to that world, and the future means that one has to adapt to that world," she said.

Ms. Courteille also talked about the importance of one-of-a-kind pieces when it comes to being a brand that will withstand the test of time.

"Many of my clients already have everything, every type of popular gemstone, or style of bag, or brand of shoes, so to get them to buy, I feel I must show them jewelry they've never seen," she said.

"Show stoppers' is a term we often use. And they love when I do. They love it. And when I see their excitement, this is the thing that encourages me to continue to design jewelry, because their jewelry is like a big treasure for them. It's their collection. And women who would spend \$20,000 on a Chanel dress are usually willing to spend \$20,000 on a piece of one-of-a-kind jewelry, which by rights, is like owning a piece of art."

Jewelry industry leader Roberto Coin feels the way to future-proof his brand and stay relevant is to offer jewelry designs to everyone, regardless of their personal style, background or culture.

"We, as humans, change all the time," Mr. Coin said. "People are looking for jewelry that is suitable for them, but that also makes them feel rare, different and beautiful. That is what expresses their personality.

"I'm grateful we are all different," he said. "And maybe this makes me either stupid or clever, but our company manufactures almost 600 new models every year in order to give the consumer more choices to apply to their personality. I'm trying to create my designs to fit in with them, regardless of their culture or style.

"We want our customers to be themselves. Nothing more, or less."

Also important to Mr. Coin and what he sees as important in jewelry's future is how the industry practices ethical standards in every aspect of what they do.

"Being ethical means everything to me," Mr. Coin said. "I was taught from a young age that ethics means everything.

"As an industry, we need to put more emphasis on ethical practices, we need to invest in ethical companies, and we need to continue to be innovative when it comes to ethical standards," he said. "But in doing so, we must not forget how to tell a true and beautiful story."

LONG-TERM THINKING to protect brand integrity and enduring value to consumers is what is driving jewelry brands, as evidenced by conversations within the business.

Maria Picchiotti, director of marketing at Vicenzaoro exhibitor Picchiotti, feels that craftsmanship and affordability will be what carries her family brand into the 2019 and beyond.

"The big pieces that we used to sell many years ago don't sell as much as they used to in this day and age," Ms. Picchiotti said. "Those have been replaced by slightly lower-price-point pieces that are still high in quality but that can be worn every day.

"For our brand, the quality of the workmanship and gemstones we use in our pieces was always what set us apart, and that won't change, no matter who is buying, or how the economy or environment changes," she said.

"We have always felt that if we give up on quality, then we will give up on everything that Picchiotti is about."

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