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Published by
Reed Business
Information.

APRIL 2005

THE INDUSTRY AUTHORITY SINCE 1869

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What Once Was Old

Some contemporary jewelry designers have put an exceptional modern slant on three ancient techniques.

With fashion's recent emphasis on all things ladylike, many women have been seeing their grandmother's hand-me-down jewelry in a new light as they hunt for long-discarded brooches or flashy right-hand rings. Some jewelry designers also are looking at old jewelry, but with an eye toward education and improvement. Intricate, ancient jewelry techniques such as granulation, creating micro-

mosaics, and chain-making are being granted a glorious new life as these designers—with infinite patience—take the techniques further than ever before.

ZAFFIRO

In the past 10 years, Elizabeth and Jack Gualtieri of Zaffiro in Portland, Ore., have reinvented an ancient technique. Granulation is a decorative jewelry technique that

BY **MONICA CLARE McLAUGHLIN**,
HERITAGE EDITOR

Is New Again

[opposite] Handmade chains in 20k gold from **Lucie Heskett-Brem** (www.TheGoldWeaver.com) retail for \$630 to \$2,200 (bracelets), \$1,300 to \$4,800 (necklaces). Photo by Louis Brem



The **Microcosm** ensemble features Australian boulder opals and fancy-color sapphires in granulated 22k yellow gold. Suggested retail price for the pendant, \$14,000; for the earrings, \$4,250. **Zaffiro**, Portland, Ore.; (503) 236-6735, e-mail: info@zaffirojewelry.com.



[left] **La Floraliere**, Zaffiro's prizewinning pin, is Art Nouveau-inspired and features a blue zircon, an American natural wing pearl, an Australian blue keshi pearl, an aquamarine briolette, diamonds, blue sapphires, and faceted tsavorite garnet beads, set in 22k yellow gold with 22k and platinum granulation. Price available upon request. [right] Zaffiro's **Marilyn** pendant sets a Colombian emerald in granulated 22k yellow gold with 18k yellow gold. Suggested retail price (mounting only), \$4,100.

dates back to 2000 B.C., and while a number of jewelry designers still use it today, the Gualtieris have elevated the craft to another level.

Granulation consists of placing tiny gold spheres on the surface of a similar gold alloy and then heating the entire piece to fuse the spheres to the surface in a permanent bond. The temperature must be precisely regulated, because if the piece is overfired, the spheres will melt onto the surface. If underfired, the spheres will not properly adhere and could fall off.

Elizabeth and Jack Gualtieri met while attending the University of Kansas. While pursuing their degrees—Elizabeth in metalsmithing, and Jack in industrial design—both worked part time at a local custom goldsmithing store. They graduated in 1992.

It was Elizabeth who was first bitten by the granulation bug. “Elizabeth studied abroad for a year over in Italy, and she saw some [ancient Etruscan granulated] pieces in a museum,” says Jack. “She really loved it, and she went out and looked it up and found a book that had photos of all the early Etruscan pieces in it.” Back in Kansas she took a seminar class on granulation at the university, but she never forgot that book. “When we got married, we went to Italy for our honeymoon, and we got it—it’s a big book,” says Jack.

The two worked for a design studio in Santa Fe, N.M., that specialized in granulation, and eventually moved to Portland, Ore., where they opened their own business, Zaffiro.

The Gualtieris were determined to push the boundaries of granulation. As they experimented, however, they realized that each color of gold requires different alloys and techniques. The Gualtieris pushed boundaries even further and accomplished what had never before been done: platinum granulation.

In addition to the technical aspect, the couple enjoys experimenting with the design of their jewelry, with pieces that combine different colors of gold or fuse platinum granulation onto gold, such as their Chiara collection.

In 2004, Elizabeth received numerous awards—including the 2004 Rio Grande Saul Bell Award Grand Prize—for *La Floraliere*, an intricate pin that incorporates 22k yellow gold granulation with pearls and gemstones. Jack says the piece went through five generations of design evolution. “Since everything we do is hand-fabricated, some things will change,” he says. “As we’re building the piece and really get down to it and rethink how it all goes together, it really starts to come into its own—it takes on its own personality. More complex pieces are constantly evolving.”

The couple currently sell their jewelry in 12 galleries across the country and also take a booth in The JCK Show ~ Las Vegas Design Center every year. For now, “It’s just the two of us,” says Jack, and the two are careful not to overstretch their capacities. “We want to keep our service up, maintain our quick turnaround time, and basically keep doing all the things that make us special.”

LAURA HISEROTE

“I breathe life into an ancient, lost art form and seek to attain the wisdom of those who composed before us,” reads the artist’s statement of master micromosaicist Laura Hiserote. Hiserote, who studied metalsmithing at the Oregon College of Art & Craft, was initially spurred by a desire for color. “My growth as a metalsmith led me to a point where patinas wouldn’t fulfill my need for more color in my

work,” she says. “I had moved from Santa Fe, N.M., to Vancouver, Wash. (just across the river from Portland, Ore.), and I was starved for the colors of the Southwest and the warmth of the sun. I had never really been interested in enameling, and I wanted more than what simply adding gemstones had to offer my work.”

She first heard the word “micromosaic” used in 1995, in relation to a ring set with millefiori canes. The piece was incorrectly labeled a micromosaic, but the colors caught her interest, and she began to search for more information on the art form. Eventually she found a picture of a late 18th-century Roman micromosaic. “From that moment, there was never a doubt in my mind,” she says. “Micromosaic was what I was going to do.”

Micromosaics are formed by placing thousands of tiny, elongated glass threads (microtesserae) alongside one another. The microtesserae are set vertically, so only the ends of the threads are visible, and the placement of colors determines the image. “Little did I know, at that time, that there was so very little information about the art form and even less about the technique,” Hiserote says. “I knew nothing about glass. With only a few clues and plenty of ‘successful failures,’ I finally completed my first piece, California Poppy, in 1999—also the year I got my patent. It is 2.1 cm in diameter and has 4,040 microtesserae.”

Hiserote has a hand in every part of her creations, including the manufacture of the glass used to create the micromosaics. She often is a presenter at Jewelry Camp, where she provides a detailed history of micromosaics as well as a demonstration of their creation. Particularly fascinating to observe is her technique for creating threads of glass so delicate they resemble strands of hair. These threads, when cut into tiny lengths, form the mosaic, and participants in Hiserote’s seminars often are invited to place microtesserae into a sample piece—a challenging task even for those with the steadiest hands.

It took Hiserote six months just to develop the glass palette for Rite of Passage, and then a full year to set the 16,394 microtesserae. Finished in 2001, the piece measures 2.5 inches x 1.75 inches and was set in a granulated 22k gold frame by Zaffiro.

When choosing subject matter, Hiserote is inspired by “the music and the harmony found in the shapes, colors, and textures of nature,” she says. “I am currently working on a series of pieces reflecting my thoughts on the night sky.” With this series, she’s incorporating diamonds into the micromosaic for the first time, and she reports “exciting” results. Hiserote also is working on a piece set in tiger’s-eye and gold that she calls Mona’s Hummingbird.

After serving a three-year apprenticeship, Hiserote’s son, Jerrad Roberts, has joined in the craft. Roberts, also a professional modern dancer, has a degree in chemistry and has used his scientific background to develop enamel glasses specifically suited to the creation of micromosaics. His mother proudly reports that he is “taking micromosaic in a whole new direction.”

Roberts also helped his mother develop a technique for creating “signature” microtesserae. It took almost three years to accomplish, but “we have managed to pull a thread with my maker’s mark in it and another with Jerrad’s,” says Hiserote. “This means that the image runs the length of the glass thread and would appear on the end of any segment taken from the thread.” The thread is only a fraction of a millimeter in diameter, and the complex maker’s mark is only visible by microscope. “I am certain that this kind of thing has



California Poppy, Laura Hiserote’s first micromosaic piece, contains approximately 4,040 microtesserae and is 2.1 cm in diameter. It is set into an 18k gold brooch. **Laura Hiserote**, Vancouver, Wash.; www.micromosaics.com.



PHOTO BY HAROLD AND ERICA VAN PELT



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[left] **Rite of Passage**, completed in 2001, contains approximately 16,394 microtesserae. It is set into a 22k gold brooch by Zaffiro, and measures 2.5 inches x 1.75 inches. [right] Detail of **Rite of Passage**.

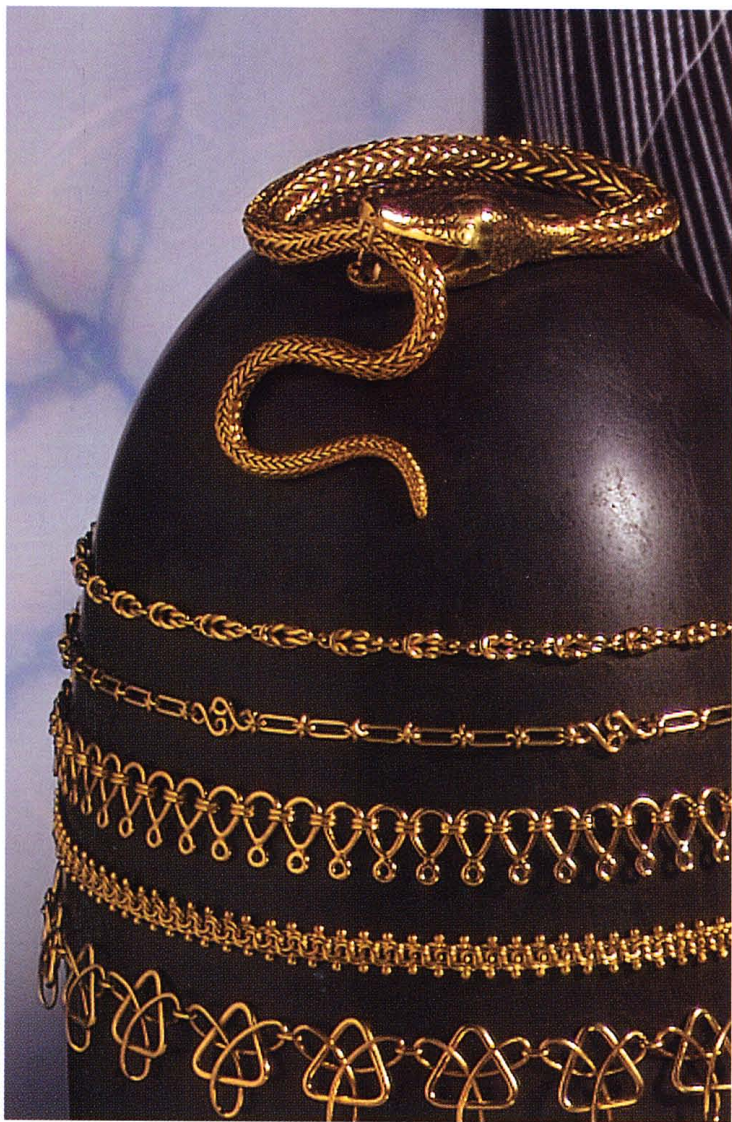


PHOTO BY LOUIS BREM

[above] Handmade snake chain in 20k gold from **Lucie Heskett-Brem** retails for \$7,200. Other chains range from \$630 to \$1,750. [below, left] **Diamond Shawl** has 540 diamonds. [below, right] **Golden Serpent** necklace retails for \$27,000, **Baby Serpent** for \$3,000. Dresses by Silvia Lottenbach Arnold.



PHOTO BY LOUIS BREM



PHOTO BY LOUIS BREM

never been done on this scale before," says Hiserote—a claim that can be made for all of her work.

LUCIE HESKETT-BREM

Like Hiserote and the Gualtieris, Swiss goldsmith Lucie Heskett-Brem is fascinated by antiquity. She's especially interested in the chain-making techniques used by centuries of jewelry designers. Known as "The Gold Weaver," Heskett-Brem painstakingly crafts intricate gold chains by hand, using primarily 20k gold.

Heskett-Brem was introduced to chain-making during a four-year apprenticeship to a goldsmith in Lucerne, Switzerland. "Chain-making was one of the first things we learned," she says, and when the wife of her master brought in a chain for repair, Heskett-Brem had an opportunity to study its intricacies. That's when she fell in love with the process.

"I like the meditative aspect of it," she says, "although most normal people don't like that!" She finds the repetition of forming link after link seductive and almost trancelike, and is happiest when she can find a rhythm in which she can "watch [her] hands work."

Heskett-Brem draws inspiration from chains she finds at antique fairs or flea markets, but her results usually vary from the original, as seen in her Daisy chain. "I saw a Victorian chain I really liked at the Burlington Market in London, and after I went back and tried to create one like it, it wound up extremely different. I went back [to the market] and showed it to the dealer there, and we saw that there was no commonality to the two at all."

When creating a chain, Heskett-Brem is primarily concerned with proportion. She experiments extensively, testing different thicknesses and lengths of gold wire until she hits on the right combination. "It has to move right and sit right in the hand—that is very important, so I make lots of trials. I have to make it my own."

There have been times when she thought she had developed her own design and invented a new chain, but "two years later I saw it in a book! It's very hard to say you invented something, but I'm not worried about something being new, I'm worried about something being right—the optimum density and movement is what I want."

Heskett-Brem's snakes are popular among her buyers and can take months to make. "With the snakes, I want as close to an animal look as I can get—I like to take it a step further and truly make it an animal. Some people are actually afraid when they see them for the first time, and that means I achieved what I wanted."

In November, Heskett-Brem's London dealer, Bentley & Skinner, held a fashion show that paired her talents with those of a Swiss dress designer, Silvia Lottenbach-Arnold. The two created a collection of dresses that emphasized another of Heskett-Brem's popular designs—delicate golden spider webs. Starting with extremely fine machine-made chain, Heskett-Brem alters each link individually. "The links are so minute," she says. "I have to open them and resolder them so that every soldering joint is perfect—they have to be, otherwise the piece is not as delicate and will lose movement." Some of her spider-web designs lay across the hand of the wearer and are secured at finger and wrist, while those used in the fashion show were attached to the gowns—stretching across the model's back or draping down her shoulders. (See "Jewels for Any Body," *JCK*, March 2005, p. 91.)

Based in Lucerne, Heskett-Brem has numerous dealers in the United States. ■