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ALAN REVERE'S
NEW BENCH SERIES

SUFFRAGETTE
JEWELRY

PLATINUM POWER

NEW MARKETING,
NEW DESIGNS

PLATINUM GETS SPECIAL TREATMENT

An Isabella Collection platinum ring with granulation is set with diamonds by Zaffiro, Portland, Ore.; (503) 236-6735.

Suggested retail price (mounting only) is \$4,000.

TECH-SAVVY JEWELRY DESIGNERS—EVER ON THE PROWL FOR THE UNUSUAL—ARE TAKING PLATINUM JEWELRY MANUFACTURING FAR BEYOND THE SIMPLE WEDDING BANDS FOR WHICH PLATINUM IS BEST KNOWN.



The woven platinum Labyrinth bracelet with Tahitian pearls is by T Lee, Minneapolis; (612) 789-2656.



BY CARRIE SOUCY, SENIOR EDITOR

Jack Gualtieri of Zaffiro has a passion for creating understated elegance through creative jewelry design. With a sense of adventure and the gift of patience, he and his partner, Elizabeth, mastered the use of granulation not only as a textured accent to their jewelry but also as a showcase in itself. Never satisfied with the status quo, the Portland, Ore.-based pair—who are better known on the smaller craft circuit than in the traditional jewelry industry—ventured into the unusual area of platinum granulation. A half-decade later, the Gualtieris have produced not only platinum-on-gold granulation but also platinum-on-platinum granulation.

The process was not an easy one, but the artists were driven by creative instinct as well as the challenge to produce something that stands out

from the masses. And in this market, success springs from such distinctive products as well as from skilled craftsmanship.

"What we were trying to do was create something a little different that made us more distinctive," Gualtieri says. "It was a challenge because it hadn't really been done, and I guess I just didn't see why it couldn't be done."

Marketing to an exclusive clientele—primarily professional women shopping for style, not price—the Gualtieris have created only a handful of the platinum granulation pieces, including a platinum-on-platinum granulated diamond engagement ring. Few other designers, with the exception of those like Mirjam Butz-Brown, have ventured into platinum granulation. The process is time-consuming and the product costly, but the result is worth investment as art, not just jewelry, Gualtieri says.

"It's not the most cost-effective process, but there's a uniqueness to the merchandise—it's art," he says. "It appeals to the savvy customer who is willing to pay for something unusual, a person with her own sense of style."

For up-and-coming designer T Lee, the decision to apply her woven gold process to platinum was driven by motivations similar to Gualtieri's. The Minneapolis-based designer had been producing her handmade 24k gold woven designs for about a year when, two years ago, she began thinking about doing something similar in platinum. After working with pure gold, she says, it seemed a

natural progression to try her hand at weaving platinum.

The process leading to the development of her woven pure platinum-over-platinum 950 was not simple—she spent about a year and a half in research and development—but the product was worth the wait, she says.

Her woven platinum technique, which she discovered thanks to consultation with both the Platinum Guild International and a metallurgist from Imperial Smelting in Canada, has helped the designer make a splash in the already saturated designer jewelry market. In 2002, her first year of exposure at the major U.S. jewelry trade shows, she was named a JCK Rising Star and won both the Mort Abelson New Designer of the Year Award and the 2002 JA Golden Apple award.

At first, she attempted to weave pure platinum over 18k white gold—the same metal she weaves over in her 24k collection. That plan was scrapped when a Platinum Guild consultant likened the process to

"putting Volkswagen hubcaps on your Mercedes." Like Gualtieri, the designer finally perfected the platinum process by venturing into the uncharted waters of various platinum alloys. Both designers cite this long learning process in describing their work with platinum. Gualtieri, for example, used trial-and-error to find what he needed: two platinum alloys with different melting points, allowing one to fuse to the other.

"I read all the books [on the properties of platinum], then tried to fig-



From the Chiaria Collection, a tanzanite and diamond pendant in 22k yellow gold with platinum granulation by Zaffiro. Suggested retail price is \$15,000.



The Camelot ring in 18k yellow gold with platinum granulation and a 10.45-ct. tourmaline by Mirjam Butz-Brown, San Diego; (619) 238-1053. Suggested retail price is \$4,680.

A ring titled "Dance with the Muses" is executed in 18k yellow gold with platinum granulation, a Tahitian pearl, and a diamond accent by Mirjam Butz-Brown. Suggested retail price is \$3,200.



ure out what its habits are," he says. "Platinum is completely different from gold."

Even after doing all the research, working with the metal surprised the designers. Discovering the right alloy, T Lee says, not only allowed her to weave the platinum but also unexpectedly made the entire platinum weaving process simpler and easier than her 24k gold work.

While her peers quickly commended her creations, T Lee's work is earning recognition outside the trade as well. The designer opened a small gallery in Minneapolis this year to showcase her woven creations and found that the unique nature of her product attracts local publicity as well as customers who appreciate the process and the design of her work. During the holiday season, for example, she sold three flexible platinum cuff bracelets at \$7,000 each in her relatively unknown store, which had been open for less than one month.

"The customers are all professionals; they are people who appreciate fine things," she says. "It is an affirmation that there is a market for this kind of design and high-end merchandise."

Last year, she showed the trade

several new flexible woven platinum bracelets—and the line is growing, she says. This year, she'll debut about eight new pieces at the spring and summer trade shows and, like Gualtieri, is ready to tackle the next technical challenge: various weaving techniques. Both are confident that there is only growth ahead for this kind of creative platinum design.

"We feel we're perfectly poised for when the economy recovers," T Lee says. ♦

A woven platinum heart accents this chain with a pearl and diamond toggle by T Lee.

