

Accessories Report

Ducas and Ayton Unveil Annoushka

By Samantha Conti

LONDON — Links of London founders Annoushka Ducas and John Ayton are back in business with a collection of fine jewelry that will roll out to stores across the U.K. later this month.

The collection, Annoushka, will be sold through eponymous boutiques at stores such as Harvey Nichols, Harrods, Selfridges, Liberty, House of Fraser and Brown Thomas, with prices ranging from 150 pounds, or \$246, for a yellow gold eternity ring, to 20,000 pounds, or \$32,800, for a diamond cocktail ring.

Husband-and-wife team Ayton and Ducas cofounded Links in 1990, and sold it to the Greek fashion jewelry company Folli Follie in 2006 in a deal valuing it at \$84 million. They will directly operate the in-store concessions, which they acquired when they purchased the British jewelry retailer Pascal last year.

The flagship Annoushka boutique will be at Harvey Nichols on Sloane Street, in the former David Morris space. It will measure 700 square feet, while the nine others will range in size from 500 to 700 square feet.

"We had the opportunity of getting back into the business, and went for it," Ayton said. "We enjoy working together, and Annoushka has a great passion for jewelry. By the time we open all the stores, we will be the best-distributed jewelry brand in the U.K."

Ayton said the two would be more focused on developing the craft than on rapid-fire expansion. There are no plans for a wholesale business or for expansion outside the U.K.

Annoushka is being positioned as a bridge collection between silver fashion jewelry and the big Bond Street jewelry brands. Ayton said the closest comparison would be the Italian brand Pomellato. At department stores, Annoushka will be sold alongside brands such as Stephen Webster, Cartier, Theo Fennell and Shaun Leane.

The two plan to sell one-off designs and offer limited runs of handmade jewelry, in addition to more commercial pieces. Everything in the collection is made from 18-karat gold.

Ayton said he expects sales to be 8 million pounds, or \$13 million, in the first year and rise to 20 million pounds, or \$33 million, in three years' time. Freestanding stores are also on the drawing board.

All figures have been converted from the pound at current exchange.

The collection has a bohemian, handcrafted feel to it, and could easily be sold in a gallery space, with jewels that range from slim, stackable diamond pavé rings, small charms and clip-on amulets, to bolder pieces created around diamonds or semiprecious gemstones such as aquamarine, tourmaline, smoky quartz and chrysocolla.

Some of the boutiques will offer a "bar" where customers will be able to toy with designing themselves, choosing from a variety of diamond pavé ring frames and gemstones and customize their own jewels.

"I really want to take the reverence out of jewelry — to make it feel less scary and formal," Ducas said during a walk-through of the collection at the couple's Chelsea home. "I also want women to see jewelry as a wardrobe: Something that can be built up over the years, or worn layered like clothing."

Ducas is working once again with the British jewelry designer and university lecturer Elizabeth Oliver, with whom she worked at Links.

Asked about launching a jewelry line during tough economic times, Ayton said it's something he'd done before. "We founded Links — which was a simple business like this one — during a recession, and took advantage of the opportunities available to us," he said. "We think the product is very 'now.' People are moving away from the flashy brands, and we're offering them quirky, versatile jewelry with a value proposition."



Annoushka's rings and gold cuff (below).



FINDINGS



A sketch of Kooba footwear.

SHOE BIZ: Kooba will launch footwear on Aug. 5 at the FFANY New York Shoe Expo.

The collection will feature platforms, flats and gladiator sandals with a similar look to the firm's classic hobo bags and totes. The shoes will retail from \$225 to \$450 and will be offered at spring market to the same distribution channels as the bags, including high-end department and specialty stores. "I've always been obsessed with shoes, so after building a successful handbag business, it just seemed like a natural next step to translate our unique mix of rich and interesting leathers, attention to detail, and an effortlessly chic sensibility into footwear," said Abbe Held, founder and creative director at Kooba.

VINTAGE SHOPPING: Yoox.com is partnering with jewelry collector and historian Deanna Farneti Cera on a series of themed sales taken from Cera's collection of vintage costume jewelry. The first sale later this month will focus on "Revisiting the '80s" and will include 20 pieces from the era, such as a Karl Lagerfeld by Ugo Correani Plexiglass and metal ruffle cuff and Yves Saint Laurent rectangular wooden earrings. Yoox.com will feature a sale every two to three months. Last week, the Bologna, Italy-based e-tailer said it was preparing for an initial public offering and could list before yearend.

DI MASSO AND DEVI: Accessories firm Devi Kroell has tapped Tony DiMasso as president and chief operating officer, a new post. DiMasso has joined the company after five years as chief operating officer at Jimmy Choo, where he was instrumental in expanding the brand's U.S. presence. Before that, he was the chief operating officer of Diesel USA. "[Kroell] has an international presence and a lot of unexplored potential," said DiMasso. "I am looking forward to a fantastic partnership with Devi as we look to take the brand to the next level of growth and drive its retail and wholesale operations." DiMasso reports to Devi Kroell, designer and chief executive officer.

MERCI GABLONZ: Parisian concept store Merci has unveiled a treasure trove of colorful vintage rhinestone jewelry crafted by the women of the Czechoslovakian village of Gablonz, where Daniel Swarovski began his glittering career. The collection's previous owner, a Gablonz native, was selling several pieces at a flea market in Vienna where it was spotted by Merci's artistic director, Daniel Rozensztroch, who bought the entire stock, until then stored in a box in a garage. Comprising 70 brooches, bracelets and holiday decorations, made from cut glass and mercury glass beads, the pieces date back to between 1900 and 1930. Designs take inspiration from the animal kingdom, be it an elephant brooch or a lobster tree decoration, or more playful themes, such as a teddy bear, or a Mickey Mouse, proving the character was already a cultural phenomenon in Eastern Europe. Pieces are 300 euros, or \$420 each, and go on sale in September.

DIVA-MADE SHADES: The House of Deréon label, cofounded by Beyoncé Knowles and mother Tina Knowles, signed a licensing agreement with Allure Eyewear to produce an eyewear collection under the brand. The initial collection of Deréon eyewear consists of optical frames and sunglasses in bold colors and oversize, glamorous silhouettes. It will be sold at major department and specialty stores around the country and retails from \$40 to \$200. "Sunglasses and eyewear add an incredible amount of appeal and they are truly an essential accessory for any look," Tina Knowles said.



House of Deréon's sunglasses.

Family Legacy Leads to Fine Jewelry

By Sophia Chabbott

NATASHA COLLIS WAS AT A CROSSROADS SEVERAL years ago.

An abstract painter, Collis had started to dabble in fine jewelry making to supplement her artist lifestyle. When the indie jewelry business took off, she had to decide which medium she would pursue. She stuck with jewelry, but wearable art has been in Collis' lexicon since childhood in London.

Her grandmother, Joan Burstein — known as "Mrs. B." — cofounded Browns, the directional British retailer that sells edgy apparel by the likes of Stella McCartney, Dries Van Noten and Comme des Garçons.

"Basically, I've lived and breathed in fashion and am very lucky for it," said Collis, 36. Her mother, Caroline Burstein, is Browns' creative director and her uncle, Simon Burstein, is chief executive officer.

"[Fashion] has never been forced on me," she said. "It felt very natural to me to be amongst the buyers. I'm not really fazed by it. It's been a good role for me in my jewelry [business]."

Burstein's pieces are delicate and whisperlike, unlike much of the fine designer jewelry in the marketplace. Using 18-karat gold, the designer and her two assistants fire up solid gold nuggets and bead them along with diamonds, and sapphires in muted

tones of gray and blue onto delicate cluster chains, fringe earrings and light bracelets. All the jewelry is handmade by Collis in Ibiza. Collis relocated there three years ago from London.

Collis counts nature as her chief inspiration and prefers her pieces to be layered for a more prominent effect.

"Its about subtlety," said Collis of her signature line. "It's about the oddness and the randomness of nature."

This fall, Collis will begin selling in the U.S. through Muse, a jewelry showroom that has a list of independent jewelers such as Yossi Harari, Monique Péan and Sally Sohn. Retail prices for the line range from \$400 to \$10,250.

In July, Collis will open an atelier in Ibiza, which will double as a store and factory.

Collis' first U.S. accounts include Hirshleifer's in Manhattan, N.Y., and Barneys New York in Manhattan and Beverly Hills. There are plans to open up to six additional stores within the next year. Internationally, the brand is sold at retailers such as Feathers and Browns in London and Vulcanize in Tokyo.

Jewelry by Natasha Collis.

