

DEBORAH PAGANI REDEFINES ART DECO

DEBORAH PAGANI's charming pieces resemble horseshoes and pills, which are every bit sparkly, eclectic and beautiful as you can imagine. 'American Made' is something that is essential to her brand, says the designer whose jewellery production is firmly established in her home city, New York. Deborah redesigns and decodes Art Deco silhouettes. Aesthetically, that translates into creations undeniably classical in their construct, and especially refreshing – inherently stylish with a modern twist.



18-karat yellow gold basket-shaped ear studs with baguette diamonds.

She worked as a hair colourist for over a decade and, while in her job, she began designing jewellery. Despite being one of the highest paid colourists under 30, Deborah left it all behind to follow her passion. Unfazed by her lack of formal training in jewellery making, Deborah, who had always been “creative and crazy about jewellery,” launched her own line – her first collection Cleopatra in the City. What helped was that when she first started out, there weren't any young designers doing Art Deco-inspired contemporary jewellery. Her namesake brand was soon picked up by leading department stores in the US and found appeal with a new and growing audience. The rest, as they say, is history. **BY SMITHA SADANANDAN.**



Being a new designer on the block, you must have faced quite a few challenges. What life lessons did you learn along the way?

I had to face many challenges. Everyone has an opinion. I think you really have to take into consideration where advice is coming from. Don't listen to people who you don't admire or respect. Surround yourself with positive people and not people who are bitter, jaded or just miserable. It really drains your creative energy.

What inspires your life and design realm?

I'm a wife, a mother of three, a designer and business owner. My plate is always full, especially after having twin boys three years ago. I really think that's why I designed so many interchangeable pieces and more "everyday" silhouettes, which I was not known for. I really wanted easy and classic that was still chic!

Who are your all-time favourite style icons?

Some of my favourites are Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, Jackie O, Babe Paley, Joan Crawford and Chloe Sevigny. Then, I fall in love with characters like Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct*. I love a femme fatale. There is such strength about all of them, and they all carried out their actions with such poise and elegance.

How do you work on a collection? Tell us more about the process – from ideation and design to manufacturing.

I always have a muse. For Americana, the inspiration was hinged on American socialites or the past with Carolyn Bessette Kennedy and Jackie Kennedy being two of my biggest influences. I loved the fact that if you look at their pictures, you can still wear what they wore and it's still chic today. Babe Paley and Lee Radziwell are also among my list of muses that I reference. Americana was spun from a dream of what I thought the 'swans' would be wearing today. I never want to design anything that looks dated.

Tell me about the pill and horseshoe design concept. How did you turn it around into such lovely pieces?

Thank you, I appreciate it. I was deconstructing my Deco Fringe earrings and noticed there was a horseshoe in

Half horseshoe ring set with diamonds and an oval-cut blue sapphire.



Five horseshoe ear jackets with studs.



Open pill ring set with white diamonds and blue sapphire baguettes.



18-karat white gold full finger ring set with white diamonds and a blue sapphire oval-cut centre stone.



Deco fringe earrings in diamonds and blue sapphires.



18-karat white gold Deca Nueva ring set with diamonds.



The Skyscraper 18-karat yellow gold stud earrings set with white diamond baguettes.



The 18-karat yellow gold Horseshoe studs set with white diamond baguettes.



The 18-karat yellow gold Open Pill cuff accented with white diamond baguettes.



The 18-karat yellow gold Deca Nueva stud earrings lined with white diamonds.



The 18-karat yellow gold Horseshoe studs get a makeover with white diamond baguettes.

it. Then while sketching, I put two horseshoes together and it made the pill shape. I love movement in jewellery and that's why there are so many fringe earrings. But I wanted them to move without seeing jump rings, it really makes a big difference. That's high jewellery! I also drew upon my research on the American socialites of the past and their timeless silhouettes.

Your jewellery is Art Deco and fun. How have you incorporated elements of Gotham silhouettes into the pieces?

Yes, that's a good way of putting it. I felt like it just fit in so well together. You just walk around the city and you see so many Art Deco motifs. The city is always changing, and things are always moving or getting updated. I think it's always good to see things modernising, while keeping their classic roots. You never want something to look like reproduction.

You've used diamonds, sapphires in your jewellery. What gemstones are you keen to use in a new collection?

Maybe star sapphire. There is something so special about the way they always shine. It's not something that I have seen recently done in fine jewellery, and I think that can be greatly refashioned.

Which is your favourite material? Is there any alternative material that you'd like to work with?

I love gold and precious stones, and am not a fan of different metals. But, I'm working with an alternative material by still staying in the fine jewellery segment. There are so many new ways to create and redefine 'fine jewellery'.

How do you balance the creative aspect with the commercial aspect in your business?

This is the hardest part for me. I wish I only had to do the creative. Social media is incredibly important in this day and age. I am constantly searching for new, exciting ideas to try out online, and how I can use them to the best of my advantage.

In terms of business expansion, is there any region you'd like to explore?

I would think Asia. Classic American-inspired pieces would bring something new into the Asian jewellery market.

Do you enjoy doing bespoke pieces? Any favourite pieces?

Yes, I love working one-on-one with the client, whether it's someone's husband/partner or the woman herself. ■