

# A NEW AGE OF DESIGN



Emerald and diamond ring



Circle Drop earrings

Meet jewellery designers from around the world whose points-of-view on design are as captivating and precious as the pieces they create

Words by **Smitha Sadanandan**



Rain or Shine earrings



Spinel ring

### DAVID MICHAEL JEWELS

Twin brothers David and Michael Robinson grew up immersed in jewellery. Their father, Ken, was always involved in the industry: He was one of the first New Zealanders to travel to the USA in the mid 1980's and complete his GIA studies, after which he worked with Backes & Strauss and then Chaumet in London. Ken returned to New Zealand to launch his own businesses, where both David and Michael worked in. Seven years ago, the twins moved to Australia to start their own brand. "This all came about when our father semi-retired and we chose to move on to a new chapter in our lives." Moving to Australia and "casting off the shackles of working in a semi-retail environment" served to strengthen their oeuvre.

**Design:** David and Michael have been transcribing their passion into original, highly-detailed marvels realised with an unhurried, artistic approach, which allows for a very liberating and totally resolved jewel to emerge from the bench. "We always create in an honest and truthful manner, and don't look for shortcuts or compromise. Everything we do is handmade; we do not use technology as a crutch. Sure, we use modern hand tools, but they are exactly that – just tools." Pushing the boundaries of high jewellery, David and Michael are led by a very organic process to make approximately 10 pieces a year. Sometimes, it is the colour of a gem or the cut that sparks a thought process; other times, it may be a prompt from daily life that triggers an idea. "If it is a 'planned' piece, we may commission gems to be cut to make the design work, sometimes we even cut our own gems."

Steering clear from a commercial approach, David and Michael have a guiding principle that defies industry norms. "We make what our heart tells us; we try and find the beauty in everything we work with." Rare and exceptional gems, like the Argyle Diamonds, lend themselves in utterly bewitching ways in the duo's wearable art. Some of their pieces present very simply but, often, this simplicity masks the hidden details or the experimental process that has allowed the piece to come alive. Respectful of the function material serves, David and Michael take a curatorial approach to their work: They ensure the metal colour does not dominate a piece, unless that is the aesthetic they are trying to achieve – this enables the designers to either "highlight or disguise the surround of gems." Colour is employed to create texture and depth, using exquisite pavé work as a painter would use oils. "The hand-painted pieces are a favourite of ours. Our initial inspiration is obviously from what has gone before historically, but we like to think that we have given a certain edge to this work that defines it as our style." It takes imagination and audacity to achieve show-stoppers of such creative magnitude, and that's what David and Michael have in abundance.

[artofdm.com](http://artofdm.com)



Yellow Beryl earrings



**MR LIEOU**

Born and raised in Hong Kong, Nicholas Lieou's desire to learn more about gems and jewellery took him to Central St. Martins and the Royal College of Art in London. His training as a jeweller in Buckinghamshire and then the Gemology Institute of America steered him towards his calling. During his time in London, Nicholas interned at numerous design houses – Phillip Treacy, Lara Bohinc, and Shaun Leane – before moving to New York in 2011 and designing for Alexis Bittar, Georg Jensen, and Louis Vuitton. The former Director of Design for High Jewelry and Custom design at Tiffany&Co. moved back to Hong Kong in 2019 to launch his own line, where he designs jewels “inspired by nature’s tenacity.”



Willow earrings

**Design:** Nicholas Lieou's body of work is an exercise in juxtaposition – minimalism and maximalism, strength and fragility, masculine and feminine. Fine and high jewellery pieces, distilling Eastern and Western aesthetics, evolve into artful, contemporary interpretations of organic forms. Shimmering diamonds and serene pearls celebrate his reverence for the craft, while amplifying a distinct aesthetic and poetic paradox. With his design and life experience growing, Nicholas embraces a more subtle and serene design philosophy. It is spurred by his innate need for the pieces to have a sense of timelessness and serenity to them. “I achieve this by using a monochromatic colour palate and modern graphic lines. This restraint of colour adds a sophistication and sense of minimalism to the jewels,” he explains, reflecting on his confidence in pursuing a more modern minimalistic direction.



Tentacle cuff



Nicholas Lieou for Sotheby's Diamonds - Reishi Edge earrings

Last Fall, Nicholas unveiled a capsule line – inspired by Yin and Yang – designed for Sotheby's Diamonds. He worked on the ten-piece collection for nearly 18 months before the launch. “They were really able to create highly engineered pieces, with excellent craftsmanship, all during the height of the pandemic. We spent hours obsessing over details that not many jewellers would be patient with, or have the technical knowledge to create such challenging pieces,” he adds. In order to create a balance between nature and modernity, Nicholas distilled the organic forms into its simplest expression. Creating strong graphic shapes, the ‘Yang’ juxtaposed with the ‘Yin’ serves as a good counterpoint for pavé diamond details that soften the modern lines. Indeed, the exclusive collection draws on his unmissable love for “linear

symmetry and Art Deco classicism” – a sleek rope of pavé-set diamonds is devised into a hammock to rock flawless round-brilliant diamonds in the Pendulum Earrings, while pavé-set diamonds cascade and spill from a pair of internally flawless pear-cut diamonds in the Willow Earrings. Knife-edge settings, reverse-set diamonds and tension-set gems – combined with disparate materials like platinum and slivers of ebony wood – lend an extraordinary allure to his works. All this offers a glimpse of how quickly and significantly his repertoire is expanding.

[mrlieou.com](http://mrlieou.com)



Pink Tourmaline Orchid earrings

**DINA KAMAL**

Dina Kamal’s architectural background informs her diverse tributes to fine and high jewellery. The pieces – all painstakingly handmade at the atelier in Beirut – are contemporary in style, architectural in perspective, and deceptively simple. A practising architect, then based in Beirut, Dina’s “random research” on vintage jewellery led to her discovery of signet rings. Spurred by curiosity, she put out a small collection of pinkie rings and based the shape on signet rings. Dover Street Market snapped it up and there was no turning back.

**Design:** Dina’s aesthetic draws on the principles of architecture: Research, process, and detail. “I create an emotional impact by understanding the essence of the space or the context in relation to the material and its purpose.” She also likes to keep things simple. Even the names of her earlier collections are pretty straightforward – Flat Plate, Flat Coin, Tube, Flat Wire, Pearl, and ID Gourmette – and reflect her fixation with proportions and unfussy forms. “Proportion is key to my work, whether jewellery or architecture. It is a measure of beauty and comfort,” she explains. Therefore, everything she makes hinges on a set of core elements. The refusal to make anything flashy sees her combining ideas for functional wearables with a “sublime fascination” for gold. “I like the colour. It is subtle and beautiful,” says Dina, who uses yellow gold sparingly, besides pink, white, or black gold. To add sparkle to the geometric creations, she falls back on diamonds in shades of white, brown, black, champagne, and sapphires in soft pink hues, occasionally employing emerald and amethyst.



Ice Cube by Chopard watch with customised diamond bracelet

Sometimes, Dina turns to industrial objects and, at other times, to architecture for inspiration: Fallingwater, a house designed by architect Frank Lloyd Wright, inspired its namesake diamond earrings. Another statement piece, the Diamond Webbed Necklace, features webby drapes of diamonds and incorporate a puzzle mechanism inspired by the spine and holds together multiple elements in a steady yet fluid way. “I design within a context. All of my pieces are based on the nature of the material and the part of the body to which they relate.”



Webbed Diamond necklace

In the past six years, she has also increasingly worked on private commissions. “I like commissions as they bring their own stories and add emotional layers to the design.” These days, such works comprise seriously big gemstones and quite a few handfuls of diamonds. Of late, Dina reimagined two watches for her clients. She transformed a vintage Patek Philippe watch into a medallion-pendant, as the client wanted her late father’s watch turned into something memorable. “I took off the leather strap and decided to glorify it as a medal,” she says. Another timepiece, the diamond Ice Cube by Chopard, in its new avatar became more glamorous. The



Customised Patek Philippe watch pendant

client wasn’t fond of the original satin strap and was happy to do away with it. “I followed the cube and grid pattern of the Ice Cube watch to create its grid bracelet and set it with diamonds.” Her latest commissioned work – a necklace in sort of a bolero style – mimics the pendulum and features the fingerprints of the client’s children. The precious and pliant piece, with mini cylinders strung together, is dusted with over 22,000 black diamonds.

[dinakamal.com](http://dinakamal.com)



Falling Water earrings





Agate, Kunzite, Natural Pearl, and Diamond earclips in platinum

**NADIA MORGENTHALER**

Nadia Morgenthaler began exploring her love of jewellery making at the age of 15. She joined the School of Decorative Arts in Geneva and after her graduation in 1989, trained for about five years with jeweller Philips Bonet. There she honed her technical skills before joining Chopard as a designer in 1994. In the meantime, she enrolled at the Haute École d'Art et de Design (HEAD). "I went back to school so that I could forget the traditional ways of designing jewellery, learn distinctly personal methods, and explore various techniques," she says. After her two-year stint at Chopard, Nadia returned to Bonet's workshop drawn by the love of "constructing" pieces. The workshop, Arts Fusion SA, regularly made spectacular pieces for prestigious brands. Working closely with her mentor, observes Nadia, was very, very important – it aided a deeper understanding of execution and artistry. "He was very demanding; it was not easy but this instilled in me

greater confidence as a bench jeweller." When Bonet decided to retire, he asked Nadia to take over his workshop. This presented her with a great opportunity – one that would see Nadia launch her own line, continue working with prominent jewellery houses, and adding new ones to the list.

**Design:** Nadia launched her eponymous line in December 2013, which was spurred by the desire "to be free to do what I want, anticipating the evolution and finish in each piece." An avant-garde influence permeates her designs, while drawing on Art Nouveau and Belle Époque influences, architecture, and a poetic universe of gems. "My design philosophy is to do what I find right and make beautiful pieces bereft of commercial constraints that may limit my creativity. It is important that my jewellery is recognizable." Every piece – chandelier and garland earrings or delicate rings – is an exciting revelation of Nadia's genius and goldsmithing ability.

Nadia's design outlines an unmistakable three-dimensionality, achieved by "working the jewel on all its sides." The design code is equally nested in the aesthetics as it is in the quality of what is not necessarily visible. Infused with a certain romanticism, her meticulously engineered wearables integrate gems like spinels, kunzite, tourmalines, opals, rock crystals, and indicolites in dreamy pastels – blush pink, soothing greens, powdery blues. Nadia also loves to punctuate her designs with natural pearls. Visual drama is enhanced by blackened red or white gold, blackened silver, platinum, and single lines of diamonds. In her pieces, red gold is used to strengthen the jewellery and enables a perfect finish; it also serves to emphasise patterns with its colour and contrast. When the brand launched, Nadia points out that she mostly "drew the jewels first and sourced the stones afterwards – and it was often smaller stones." The latest pieces that



Tourmaline, Spinel, Diamond, and Natural Pearl earclips in red gold and silver

were part of 'Phillips Flawless X Vivarium – Showcasing the work of 20th and 21st Century Female Designer-Jewellers,' curated by Vivienne Becker, shows a marked difference – it sees the designer contemplating on sumptuous stones. "This series really stems from the stones that I found; it sparked my creative process. I have used brighter colours and bigger stones," adds the designer, who makes around a dozen pieces a year. ☺

[nadia-morgenthaler.com](http://nadia-morgenthaler.com)



Spinel, Diamond, and Natural Pearl earclips in red gold and silver