

Ireland

inspires



*TJH 14k white gold ring set with
.60cts of Colombian emeralds
and .50cts of diamonds*

Irish jewellery offers a touchstone to the past and a vision for the future—something that interests a lot of Canadians • BY MARGUERITE BOURKE

Despite the recent economic downturn, Irish craft and design is growing considerably; the craft sector in Ireland is worth €500 million to the Irish economy.

Currently, 25 per cent of Irish jewellery is exported; however, that figure is expected to rise as more designers focus on international markets, including Canada.

Ross O'Colmain, SVP Enterprise Ireland, Canada, comments: "Enterprise Ireland has been working with leading Irish jewellery designers to accelerate their exposure in the Canadian market. We have had a very positive response from local Canadian buyers who embrace the story that Irish designers are conveying through their inherently distinctive pieces."

AUTHENTIC AND UNIQUE

The global recession has caused consumers to become more discerning about their purchases; while they may be buying less, they want to invest in gifts that are authentic and unique, and that will last. Retailers and consumers alike are considering the story behind a product and asking if it has something modern and contemporary to say, as well as authenticity.

In celebrating the unique provenance of Irish craft, the Crafts Council of Ireland developed a new consumer brand to encourage consumers to buy Irish craft: “Imagined, Designed, Made in Ireland.”

As part of its drive to bring Irish craft and design to a global audience, 10 Irish jewellers recently participated at Inhorgenta, the major international trade fair in Munich, Germany under the “Imagined, Designed, Made in Ireland” brand.

“Since the time of the Celts, Ireland has been internationally renowned for its quality jewellery making, and we are on a journey to recapture this reputation, traceability, authenticity,” says Brian McGee, Head of Market Development at the Crafts Council of Ireland. “And ultimately, communicating the story of Ireland and our heritage to consumers is a crucial factor to the selling process, and is all a part of this uniquely Irish brand.”

RICH TRADITIONS

When you consider Irish jewellery, and how it has evolved over time, one trait is consistent: virtually every piece has a meaning or story behind it.

Ireland has a rich history of jewellery design, which can be traced to its Celtic roots. As far back as 2000 BC, Celtic craftsmen adapted ideas from

nature to produce intricate designs based on simple motifs, using gold, bronze and silver. Triskeles, spirals, animal motifs and later crosses were woven into Celtic knotwork designs in rings, torcs, bracelets, earrings, brooches and pendants.

Craft jewellery in Ireland is mostly hand made in hallmarked sterling silver, though a recent trend of mixing materials has emerged: adding touches of gold to silver.

Today Irish jewellery designers continue to be inspired by their Celtic roots and heritage, while embracing design and innovation.

The Crafts Council of Ireland is the main champion of the craft sector and has been working with the Irish jewellery sector to promote the quality, authenticity and evolution of jewellery design, at home and overseas.

“There is no single design aesthetic in Ireland,” says McGee. “While Celtic designs are perhaps the best known, especially internationally, Irish art colleges have been producing extremely passionate and creative new designers who have brought a real sense of contemporary design and innovation to the sector.”

GETTING TO KNOW IRISH JEWELLERY DESIGNERS

Solvar’s “History of Ireland” is a collection of hand-crafted jewellery from Ireland. Each piece in the collection is engraved with panels that represent some of the most significant eras in Irish history. It begins with the Celtic swirl dating back to the Neolithic age, right through to the Partition of Ireland in 1920. Available in 14k gold and sterling silver, the collection includes rings, bracelets, pendants, earrings, cufflinks and brooches.

TJH design wedding rings, hand-made in their Dublin workshop, in a combination of metals, including sterling silver, 10k, 14k, 18k and platinum. Their Eternal Celtic Wedding Band Collection sells very well in North America, and the rings denote an appreciation of Celtic heritage and design. JMH Manufacturing is a similar story: a family-run business in Dublin producing Irish classic jewellery, bearing the Irish Hallmark that you will find on every single piece. As is the case for Irish designers, the “Made in Ireland” stamp conveys the quality and workmanship that has been passed down through the generations.

Jean Butler is a well known Irish name. She’s famous for her leading role in the international Irish dancing phenomenon, Riverdance. She has designed jewellery called The Jean Butler Jewellery Collection, which captures her charm, grace and finesse perfectly, while subtly reminding the wearer of Irish heritage. The Jean Butler Collection observes and recognizes the many diverse aspects of Ireland’s character in a most unique and contemporary manner. Each piece is carefully crafted in sterling silver, complemented by gold toning.

Ireland is leading the way with some of its newer, innovative designers inspired by Ireland’s past, yet moving toward more unique, edgier designs.

Jean Butler with her sterling silver jewellery



TJH wedding band, with yellow gold Celtic braided centre with polished gold rims



Christina Brosnan, grew up in County Clare, a hotbed of craft, inspired by her mother, who made fine Irish lace. The wild Irish landscape has influenced her designs, and her collections feature three-dimensional bead-weaving techniques.

Christina has recently introduced her new collections, "Contour" and "Osseous." Both collections use sterling silver or 14k rolled gold with semi-precious gemstone and bone. The pieces in this collection are dual purpose; they can be worn as a necklace or in your hair, for example. Christina explains, "This gives them a 'transformer' type quality and makes them playful pieces."

Christina Brosnan with her osseous tube necklace, bone and 14k gold fill

A former sculptor turned goldsmith, Martina Hamilton is one of Ireland's leading producers of contemporary Irish jewellery. She takes a figurative, experimental approach to making jewellery, working mainly sterling silver with 18k gold accents. For more than 20 years, her distinct, award-winning international brands, including "Spirit of Ireland," have been designed and handcrafted in her rural studio in the west of Ireland.

Inspired by the poetry of Yeats and the beauty of her local landscape, Martina continues to design new jewellery collections, her latest being "Oyster Pearl" and "Full Moon." Pearls catch the light, and reflect and contrast with either textured or polished metal surfaces in the Oyster Pearl collection. Full Moon, Ice Moon and Blue Moon pendants embellished with precious stones represent the seasonal moons.

Maureen Lynch's designs espouse elegant simplicity and high quality. Each piece is pared down and sculptural, eliminating all manner of fuss.

"I fell in love with metal 20 years ago," says Lynch. It has been an ongoing affair. "Simplicity is what I like. My pieces take their cue from the body itself. I always bear in mind the contours of the body when designing, so that the wearer feels comfortable and at ease." Her signature oval perfume bottles on a silver chain come with a swatch of linen inside them that you can spritz with your favourite scent so that you and only you can smell it. You can also keep a lock of hair, a love poem or photograph inside.

Lynch says, "I keep a child's drawing in mine." This collection has flourishes of gold in its silverwork, so people can mix and match it with their jewellery.

Fiona Kerr's "Celtic Chaos" collection is a modern mix of Celtic designs, coupled with the chaotic randomness of nature. Kerr explains, "The inspiration for Celtic Chaos came from a couple of different directions, I liked the idea of getting movement into my work, but without it looking too mechanical or over engineered. By having the silver balls rolling around inside, you get movement and sound, something to engage the wearer. The spiral design came from a combination of influences from Celtic art and the geometry in nature. When I look at this range, I often think about swirling galaxies."

The holes in the top layer of silver are all drilled individually, so no two items are the same. Using silver and 22k yellow gold for this design brings it to life, enhancing the three dimensional form. The polished gold surface on the inside almost makes it look as if there is a light inside. [CJ]

Marguerite Bourke is VP, Consumer Retail, Enterprise Ireland, Canada, which is the Irish Government's trade development board responsible for the acceleration of Irish businesses in global markets.

Fiona Kerr Celtic Chaos silver and 22k yellow gold bi-metal

Martina Hamilton oyster pearl pendant, sterling silver with cultured freshwater pearl