

THE JEWELLER *picks...*

FAIRTRADE JEWELLERY

Last month saw the UK's first ever press event devoted to Fairtrade jewellery and in particular the arrival of Fairtrade gold from East Africa. As well as providing a showcase for collections from a handful of designers and brands working with Fairtrade metals and responsibly-sourced stones, the afternoon included a panel discussion, chaired by Sarah Carpin of event host, Facets PR.

Sitting alongside the likes of Cred's Alan Frampton and Judith Lockwood of Arctic Circle – faces familiar to those with their finger on the pulse of 'ethical' jewellery – was Josephine Aguti, a mineworker from Uganda.

This inspiring young woman had been introduced to a Fairtrade fact-finding party – including Frampton and Lockwood – when earlier this year they visited her mine, soon to receive certification to supply Fairtrade gold.



The NAJ's Michael Rawlinson and Judith Lockwood (Hockley Mint/Arctic Circle)

CRED JEWELLERY

The UK's original Fairtrade jeweller, Chichester-based Cred first used ethical gold in 2004, brought in from Oro Verde, a Columbian mining cooperative. Cred went on to become the force behind getting gold Fairtrade accredited in February 2011. Since then all of the gold used by Cred has been Fairtrade gold from Peru. The first jewellery to be hallmarked with the Fairtrade standard was created by CRED Jewellery for Livia Firth to wear on the Oscars red carpet in 2011 and it launched the world's first Fairtrade silver jewellery in 2012. The 'Grace' Collection (right) uses a balance of diamonds and metalsmith techniques to create engagement rings with delicate style. The pavé set diamonds and milgrain detailing enhances the reflected light and gives the illusion of a large solitaire from a distance.



Liz Earle and Josephine Aguti

The oldest of nine children, Aguti started working with her mother in the mine, from the age of 12, often bunking off school to do so. Even after getting a place at a boarding school she went back to the mine during the holidays. With what *must* be understatement, Aguti told us that "life wasn't easy". She added that child labour – as well as illiteracy – is a big problem in her community. "I couldn't just look on and do nothing."

So, galvanised, Aguti established a women's group, passing on knowledge of, for instance, the dangers of certain mining practices (such as the unprotected use of mercury). Thus empowered (now with

protective gear, better water supply and education and a fair price for their gold) life at the artisanal mines is getting a little easier. Sitting in front of a packed roomful of press, telling her moving and powerful story, Aguti was (and is) a living embodiment of the difference choosing Fairtrade gold can make to the lives of mine workers.

Following the panel discussion, during which the NAJ's CEO Michael Rawlinson also spoke, there was a chance to take a close look at a selection of jewellery created using Fairtrade gold and silver and speak to the designers who choose to work with responsibly-sourced materials.



SEPTEMBER ROSE – SAMANTHA ROSE ▼

“I grew up with a very wide view of the world – I have always been interested in where things have come from and I was aware from quite a young age of the moral and environmental issues associated with gemstone mining. It led me to question where all my raw materials came from and how they were mined and I resolve to only buy direct from small-scale projects or through third party certified supply chains. For me ethical sourcing includes both the environment and the people; they are equally important in my mind.

“It’s important to educate everyone involved in artisanal mining about the potential for serious health issues relating to the use of toxic chemicals commonly used to extract the gold from the amalgamate. And how the areas are mined with respect to the environment and local resources, is critical to ensuring that the land will be protected and useable for future generations to support their families.



“[The industry as a whole] needs to celebrate the fact that ethically sourced jewellery is a higher form of luxury (not some hippy cause). We should work towards ethical sourcing being the norm – for ‘origin unknown’ to be unacceptable.”

MASTERCUT ▶

Bridal jewellery brand Mastercut is renowned for its own, special cut of diamond – with 89 facets (32 more than the traditional round brilliant) and a star pattern, each stone delivers maximum sparkle. This year it upped the ante by making its range of engagement rings, wedding bands, pendants and earrings, available in 18ct white, yellow and rose Fairtrade gold, sourced from newly-accredited gold mines in East Africa.



HOCKLEY MINT ◀

Birmingham-based jewellery manufacturer Hockley Mint is committed to working with Fairtrade gold – MD Gary Wroe was in the group that visited the artisanal mine in Tanzania.

The company is transparent about its use of Fairtrade metals, explaining that the average Fairtrade gold ring costs around eight per cent more than its equivalent traditional gold band. Hockley Mint’s short film about the African trip, shows retail customers how responsible sourcing can make a difference. “We hope that [they] will then, in turn, tell their customers that it’s a small price to pay to know a piece of jewellery has full traceability and is supporting mineworkers and their families,” says Wroe.



LIZ EARLE ▲

One of the speakers was Liz Earle, best-known for founding her eponymous natural beauty range and now channelling her passion for working ethically into a jewellery collection in collaboration with Cred Jewellery. Having created a charity piece for Boodles last year, Earle was inspired to learn more about the industry, and particularly by sourcing responsibly. She answered her own question as to whether there was a consumer desire for Fairtrade jewellery, by appearing on QVC with one of her botanics-inspired necklaces... and selling out in the first half hour. “There’s a tremendous appetite for it if you tell the story,” she concluded.

SORREL BAY – MARIE WALSHE ▼

“I was brought up on Fairtrade products – my family all live as ethically as they can in their daily lives, so even though I am relatively new to Fairtrade gold, it has been something within our industry that had been an issue for me for some time.

“It is a constant battle for a creative person to achieve the end goal in an ethical way. Sadly many of the routes are not as transparent as they should be and this needs to change. It has been said many times, but why are people interested in where their bananas came from but not their gold or diamonds? It’s fantastic that we’re able now, through Fairtrade gold, to purchase our gold in an ethical way. We now need to make change within the gemstone and diamond industry too.

“Though I have been a jeweller for many years working on silver collections, I am just launching Sorrel Bay Fine Jewellery – something that has been brewing within me for many years. They are hand crafted, one of kind, British-made luxury pieces with soul – heirlooms, designed to be treasured. It was imperative to me that something that was going to bring great happiness to one person had not brought any sadness or destruction in its creation, to either people or planet.”



TESSA PACKARD FOR HOUSE OF ELÉONORE

The debut collection from the sustainable, Amsterdam-based jewellery label House of Eléonore, has been co-designed by British jeweller Tessa Packard. Very serious about encouraging ethical thinking in the industry, it leads by example in its use of Fairtrade gold and lab-created diamonds “in the hope of building a transparent and ecological supply chain within its business,” says Packard.

“I would certainly argue that attitudes are changing with regards to using lab-created diamonds in fine jewellery. One factor certainly encouraging change is price and accessibility – they are comparatively cheaper to acquire, and unless a trained gemmologist happens to examine your ring with his specialist equipment, no one will be any wiser to the origin of your stone. Fairtrade gold, in my opinion, comes across far fewer barriers in terms of authenticity or desirability. It is a far more established phenomenon with its only negative being the time investment needed to obtain the Fairtrade accreditation, its accessibility and its premium price.”

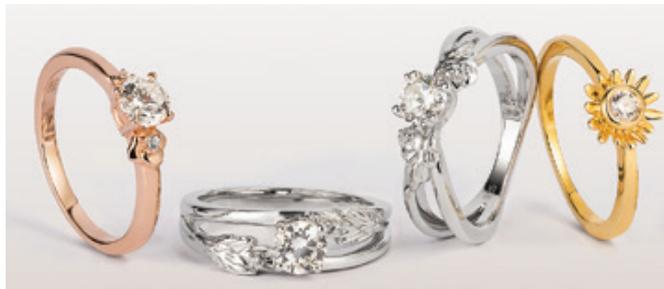


ARABEL LEBRUSAN

“My journey began when I started working in the Far East as a fashion jewellery designer in my late 20s. Seeing the world of mass production and the abuse of natural resources in jewellery made me think: ‘This is not sustainable... I want to find another way... this cannot be my trade’.

“Since then, ‘ethical’ has been the only choice for me, and it concerns everything – the materials that we use, the processes, manufacturing, packaging and the studio. For me, the words that best define something ethical are ‘traceability’ and ‘sustainability’. Also, I tend to use traditional craftsmanship... as a way to sustain traditional techniques, not letting them disappear.

“Ten years ago no one knew what ethical gold meant, but now many customers come to me specifically to buy Fairtrade gold – they understand the added benefits. But there needs to be much more press around the subject. It would also help if retailers commit to sell at least one ethical designer/brand each, so when a customer comes in the store, they can see the ‘Fairtrade/Ethical’ logo. An open conversation between designers and retailers about margins, and flexibility on the retailer’s side will definitely help.”



ANNA LOUCAH

“Meeting ethical fashion designers led me to consider where my own materials were coming from, and my research showed that the only way I could be sure no further environmental damage was caused by gold mining practices was to use recycled metals. This in turn drew me to others with similar viewpoints, such as gem dealers with traceable supply chains, and gradually a network developed.

“I can’t see any reason to not work in Fairtrade metals – if you have the option to do something positive, that connects you directly with the hands of those that get your precious metals out of the ground, that leads to a system that is sustainable and beneficial – why wouldn’t you?

“It shouldn’t be the duty of the individual business to brand itself as ‘ethical’, ‘Fairtrade’, etc – the responsibility should pass to companies not paying attention to these issues and they should state ‘provenance unknown’. I am aware of how idealistic and currently unrealistic this is, but it’s an interesting idea to tussle with.

“I’m really optimistic about the future for responsible sourcing in the jewellery industry – the next generation of designers coming through will have always had these topics in front of them. It’s easier to source Fairtrade metals these days, but it would be great to be able to walk into my bullion dealer in Hatton Garden and buy any product I need in Fairtrade metal – instead of having to place a special order, and we need a much greater variety of chain and products such as tube.”

ARCTIC CIRCLE

As well as offering couples getting engaged the chance to choose ethical jewellery – Fairtrade gold rings set with fully-traceable Canadian diamonds – Arctic Circle now has a daywear diamond collection. Created in collaboration with British jewellery designer Sarah Jordan, the ‘Northern Lights’ pendants, earrings and rings feature Jordan’s signature flowing lines and pay homage to the shimmer and shapes of the aurora borealis – the diamonds nestling in the twists and turns of the gold.

