

Vicenzaoro January 2023 Showcases The Best Jewelry And Watches Made In Italy And Elsewhere

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Italy has been producing gold and silver jewelry of distinctive beauty and artisanship containing various gemstone materials since the late 8th century B.C. While the country's four major jewelry centers are Vicenza, Valenza, Arezzo and Torre del Greco, the Italian city of Vicenza's guild of goldsmiths and artisans has been creating jewels of distinction since 1399. This rich tradition qualifies Vicenza as Italy's ancestral atelier and home of fine and high jewelry design and manufacturing. Given Italy's historic artistic and technical leadership in the fine and high luxury jewelry sectors, it makes perfect sense that in January 2023, **Vicenzaoro, the world's largest and most well-attended jewelry fair**, attracted people from 136 countries to survey more than just jewelry: the fair also includes a concurrent international show called T.Gold, which showcases the world's latest innovative machinery and technologies used for gem cutting and jewelry making. For designers, manufacturers and media, Vicenzaoro and its many realms including T.Gold revealed numerous new creative and production possibilities embodied in innovative designs, technologically advanced tools, instruments and equipment.

January 2023's Vicenzaoro drew 11.5 percent More Attendees Than The January 2020 Pre-Pandemic Show

This writer attended the 69th edition of Vicenzaoro from January 20 – 24, 2023; this is the first article in a three-part series on the epic show. Judging from the 1,300 exhibiting brands from 36 nations who exhibited their respective jewelry, watches and tools, Earth's fine jewelry industry is enjoying artistic renewal and economic vibrancy. The January 2023 edition of Vicenzaoro drew 11.5 percent more attendance than the show's pre-pandemic January 2020 fair. This signifies an all-time record, despite the fact that this year's show was one day shorter than 2020's.

It's worth noting that the **Made in Italy merchandise mark**, upholding the country's leadership in fine design, artisanal finesse and timeless chic, also identifies products entirely designed, manufactured and packaged in Italy that embody high quality precious gemstones, noble metals and other superb jewelry materials. While Made in Italy jewelry originated in antiquity, it increasingly embodies cultural and environmental relevance today as shoppers are offered ever more mass-produced jewelry designs, many of which are often inexpensive knock-offs of prestige goods containing inferior materials like plastic, resin or cubic zirconia. Unlike Made in Italy-marked jewelry, these products have horrific environmental impacts due to their production cycles and lack of bio-degradability or recyclability. What's more, inexpensive and imitative jewelry designs also often skirt the boundaries of copyright infringement.

North America Is Now Italian Jewelry's Top Export Market

Italy exported 10 billion euros worth of jewelry last year, according to comments made during Vicenzaoro's opening ceremony in the Teatro Palladio. As **Claudia Piaserico, president of FEDERORAFI** (the Italian Federation of gold jewelry, silverware and jewelry producers) told this writer during a morning meeting at the fair, "We in our industry are thrilled at how many countries, especially the U.S., are embracing Italian jewelry now that the worst of the pandemic seems to have passed. In 2021," Piaserico related, "sales of Italian jewelry in the U.S. totaled nearly 1.3 billion euros, which adds up to 16% of all Italian jewelry exports. As it was in the 1990s, North America is now once more the top export market for Italian jewelry."

When asked to explain possible reasons powering the *risorgimento* of Italian jewelry among U.S. shoppers in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Piaserico ventured, "Beautifully designed;

beautifully handmade jewelry provides sensual pleasure for those who wear it and see it. People want to feel super-alive again after the pandemic years and wearing jewelry makes a very positive statement to the world.” There may also be psychologically protective reasons behind the rise in Italian jewelry sales in the U.S. After all, as many anthropologists in academic literature have noted, people in world cultures throughout history have worn jewelry for visual effect, ceremonial purposes; social status and festivities, “but also for protection from malign forces such as disease,” said London-based anthropologist, jewelry designer and London boutique owner Pippa Small.

Key Jewelry And Watch Opinion Leaders Led Multimedia Presentations And Informative Panels

Presented by the **Italian Exhibition Group (IEG)** at Vicenza Expo Center, Vicenzaoro is the first and most heavily attended international jewelry fair, and the five-day event is where new designers and important trends come to the attention of luxury retailers and gain coverage in the jewelry and fashion media. Compared to all other international jewelry fairs, the annual January edition of Vicenzaoro is culturally and professionally differentiated by its concentration of key opinion leaders (KOLs) and the programmed talks they present which explore how cultural, environmental, social and ethical procedures are affecting the style, substance and spirit of the jewelry and watch industries.

For example, take Paola De Luca, Founder and Creative Director of the Trendvision Jewellery + Forecasting consultancy, whose multimedia presentation in the Teatro Palladio, **DREAMSCAPES: Between Reality and Fiction**, explored how the jewelry sector is affected by past and present fine art and mainstream consumer culture trends, socio-economic, environmental and political trends, along with current counter-cultural tendencies. (DeLuca’s consultancy works in collaboration with the IEG Group to direct an independent think tank to produce special events for Vicenzaoro.) DREAMSCAPES featured discrete audio-visual presentations from Bella Neyman and J.B. Jones, co-founders of New York City Jewelry Week, the digital video artist Ferdi Alici of Istanbul-based Ouchhh Studios and Madrid-based haute luxe jewelry designer Wallis Hong. Animated by music, video and still imagery, all presentations illustrated how jewelry history, coupled with contemporary art and current social conditions are affecting the way designers are conceptualizing new jewelry forms and designs, developing innovative uses for various jewelry materials and advancing artisanal techniques to make jewelry that shoppers wear and treasure to express emotions, ideas and dreams.

As **Marco Carniello, IEG’s Global Exhibition Director, Jewellery & Fashion**, explained to this writer during the fair, Vicenzaoro is a trade show as well as a community of jewelry designers, manufacturers, activists, journalists and educators. “We aim to be the reference point for the global jewelry industry,” he began. “Our staff works year-round to build a show, with two editions per year, in January and September, that supports all exhibitors, showcases Made in Italy jewelry while also providing established and emerging brands in the international jewelry trade with a chance to interface with the world. All of Vicenzaoro’s various talks and presentations, some of which are open to the public,” Carniello continued, “feature jewelry business leaders, important designers, heritage jewelers and watchmakers, jewelry and watch experts from many countries, plus sustainability experts who are working to help jewelry companies improve their environmental, social and governance practices.” It is also worth noting that Vicenzaoro is the only international jewelry fair that devotes substantial time and resources to discussing how the world’s intangible jewelry heritage can be taught and effectively transmitted to younger generations.

For example, the panel entitled **Sustainability Through Successful Succession**, sponsored by the **World Jewellery Confederation (CIBJO)** and moderated by Lisa Koenigsberg, founder and President of the New York-based non-profit Initiatives in Art and Culture, explored how heritage companies and independent jewelry designers infuse contemporary creations with venerable jewelry traditions, fine materials and labor-intensive; time-intensive techniques. Encouraging news

presented on the panel came from coral expert **Enzo Liverino**, who related how he has established a school that teaches the intricacies of coral carving to young people in Torre del Greco, Italy. Liverino has also established a world-renowned museum that houses superb examples of all eight species of precious coral.

In a similar vein, **Sarah Fabergé, Head of the Heritage Council and Director of Special Projects at the heritage company Fabergé**, is keeping venerable traditions such as guilloché enameling alive by continuing to produce watches and jewels containing this beautiful yet antique technique. As Fabergé explained via video link from London during the presentation, “We recognize the special skills of the craftsperson. Our project as jewelers is to be creators and caretakers who are staying stylistically current, alive and relevant, rather than under a dome.”

Sourcing New Timepieces And Sharing Horological Knowledge

Carniello observed that with clock-making traditions dating to the 14th century, Italy’s also a heritage watchmaking center. “We imagine Vicenzaoro as Italy’s new watchmaking destination,” Carniello continued. “In the last three years, we have introduced new and innovative formats that mix B2B and B2C components. We offer cultural and training events that create rich opportunities for discussion and networking for professionals, as well as for watch enthusiasts and collectors.” A standing-room only panel on **Italian Watch Making and Its Secrets**, sponsored by Locman’s Marco Mantovani, was moderated by Dody Giussani and featured Professor Ugo Pancani of the Fondation de la Haute Horlogerie (FHH). Among many other fascinating facts, Professor Pancani related how in addition to designing/engineering the great dome of Florence, the legendary Brunelleschi was also a clockmaker. Also on this program were mega-collector Sandro Fratini, who owns more than 2,000 watches, and Carlo Fontana, whose father served as president of OMEGA Italy. Fontana related how his father played a vital role in Italian watchmaking for decades.

Vicenzaoro’s VO Vintage Marketplace For Jewelry and Watches

Gracing the Fair for the fourth time was **VO Vintage**, a marketplace for fine vintage watches and jewelry that is open to the public. This writer counted collectors speaking in at least ten different languages as they tried on and purchased treasures from great eras in jewelry and timepieces from high points in horological history. This January, Vicenzaoro also debuted a new business-to-business horological realm called **TIME**. Encompassing contemporary watchmaking with multi-channel distribution and its supply chain, TIME ticked with approximately 50 independent, design-driven and technically astute brands, including Italian ones like Locman, U-Boat and Gagà Milano. Also present were several Swiss watch companies selected by Swiss Creative Lab.

According to Carniello, “This January, foreign buyers from 136 countries doubled compared to the 2022 winter edition (+105%), counting close to 60% of the total.” (They surveyed and ordered fine jewelry, unbranded jewelry designs, precious gemstones and innovative jewelry packaging plus visual merchandising products.) Supplying more data that portrays the show’s international reach, Carniello recounted, “Foreign exhibitors made up 40 percent of the total exhibition, and 13 percent of them came from Asia.” These are important indicators, Carniello continued, “of a full return to Vicenzaoro’s international representation of the entire jewelry supply chain, which gathers together all of Made in Italy plus the very best from the rest of the world.” Or, as **CIBJO president Gaetano Cavalieri** related, “We are all fortunate to be here at Vicenzaoro, working in a business based on fine design, precious materials, master craftsmanship, great beauty, the wonders of the natural world and enduring quality.”