



The soft, three-dimensional shapes of the necklace set from the Imperial Rome Collection interpret the elegance of the tunics worn by female Roman nobility. The large shapes and transparent cabochon-cut amethyst, citrine and peridot stones symbolize the splendours of ancient Rome. The jewels present freestyle engraving of acanthus leaf reminiscent of the magnificent Roman architecture. The necklace consists of a pendant with an openable clasp, earrings, bangle and ring, and it moves from large, medium to small shapes, showcasing high levels of goldsmithing. This line was selected by the World Gold Council as "Design Gold Expressions 2010".



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Dr. Maria Loretta De Toni is one of Italy's most feted jewellery designers. She shuns the tag of a designer, and instead chooses to call herself a stylist. She is famous for assimilating and filtering the quintessence of several cultures and ancient civilisations and bringing these elements in her jewellery. This cultural ambassador of jewellery has a deep connection with India – her first meditation teacher was of Indian origin and her all-time inspiring personality is Mahatma Gandhi, who she calls 'the great soul'.

Maria dabbles in painting, writes poems and is of the belief that the future of the jewellery industry lies in making culturally strong designs. Aesthetics alone doesn't matter to her. She believes that every piece of jewellery must convey the inner message of the artist.

By Shanoo Bijlani

MARIA DETONI

Style Envooy





Flexible snake bangles from the Cleopatra collection crafted in yellow and white gold and set with natural citrine, aquamarine, and emerald.



The necklace set (above) from the Odalisk collection is mounted in white and yellow gold embellished with art deco engravings and semi-precious gemstones. (Right) A close up of the butterfly clasp bearing Maria's signature.

Fashion, culture and design are three words that enchant Dr. Maria Loretta De Toni, who runs an eponymous company in Sandrigo, a city situated in the northern part of Italy. Her work replicates and captures the spirit of Italian arts, crafts, history and architecture. The stylist commingles two

passions that are very dear to her. The first is her devotion to studying history and different civilizations and second, her zeal for creating jewellery that has cultural references.

“Artefacts and jewellery of a country are expressions of its rich heritage and tell a lot about the background of its people,” she notes. “Everyone should be able to enjoy each other’s culture. This helps to promote aesthetic renaissance in the world.”

Maria, who has earned a doctorate in Foreign Languages, Literatures and Cultures (Germanistic Studies) in Italy, and is fluent in English, German and French, is anchored to the traditional ways of Italian goldsmithing. Surprisingly, though, she finds it liberating to seek artistic influences from different cultures.

Gold becomes putty in her hands as she uses hand-crafted techniques to add varied textures and tones to the metal. She also adds sparkling touches by way of gemstones and enamels.

No ornament is complete without a special patented butterfly clasp, which bears her signature. In a freewheeling interview with *Adorn*, Maria De Toni talks about her inspirations and insights.

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The 18 karat gold necklace set with white and black diamonds, emeralds, and rubies features the colours of the UAE flag, and hand engraving of the acanthus leaf, symbol of the Italian renaissance with the arabesque influence in the design. The limited edition necklace set is from the Al Nahda East & West Jewellery Renaissance Collection inspired by the Seven Sheikhs that gave birth to the UAE UNITY in 1971. (Below) Oil painting by Maria De Toni of the seven UAE UNITY sheikhs © 2011.



Why do you like to call yourself a stylist and not a designer?

In my opinion, a stylist analyses the impact of a particular style or a concept used in a design – from the inside to the outside.

If you were not a jewellery designer, what would you be?

A university professor for cultures applied to economy.

When did you start designing jewellery?

I began designing jewellery when I was in my youth, although my main job has always been historical research and seeking art inspiration from poetry and painting.

As an art historian, how do you connect making jewels and history into your creations? Do you weave stories into your jewellery pieces based on a historical period or a particular culture?

Yes, I always reference from history and cultures. A good example would be my jewellery collections based on my book ‘The Routes of Gold – Vicenza, Venice The Serenissima and the Orient [1404-2004]’. I explored the role of seduction through arts and jewellery in the bygone eras. My collections ‘The Favourite’, ‘Odalisk’, ‘The Venetian Courtesan’ and ‘The Geisha’ are based on this theme.



MARIA'S MILESTONES

1988-1990 | Co-authored a book ‘Fascism and Exile’ volume 1 and volume 2 by Maria Sechi, Giardini Editori, Pisa.

1998 | Participated in International Competition of Gold Jewellery Design based on the African culture.

1999-2000 | Participated in International Gold Jewellery Design Competition based on Arabic culture directed by the Architects Afra e Tobia Scarpa.

2004 | Project Leader for the book and the exhibition The Routes of Gold – Vicenza, Venice “The Serenissima” and the Orient (1404 – 2004), 11

January – 31 March 2004 at Palazzo Chiericati, Civic Museum of Vicenza in collaboration with orientalist Dr. Cristina Del Mare and jewellery historian Giulietta Cozzi.

2004 | Created 20 designs based on Islamic Art, including the poetry of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince, ruler and prime minister of Dubai and vice president of the UAE. Research, design and artistic drawings were made in collaboration with G. Cozzi for the Islamic Gallery for His Highness’ yacht.

2010-11 | She was the spokeswoman of ‘Integrated Economy for the Revival of the Made in Italy’® conferences held in Italy and Dubai.

You did a series of initiatives: from UNESCO-sponsored “Jewel for Peace” to “The Gold Roads” and more. How did this come about?

For me jewellery is a vehicle of culture and peace. If you notice, jewellery has always played a prime role in all fields such as religion, politics, family and relationships. Jewellery is about establishing your identity. In the past, it was significant for recognizing and distinguishing different tribes, while today it is important to give identity to the different markets by enhancing heritage and tradition of each country and people in order to challenge and overcome price competitiveness in the world.

You created 20 designs based on Islamic art. Could you tell us more about the inspiration behind the pieces?

I was inspired by the Nabati (Bedouin poetry) of H.H. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum that I translated into Italian. The key was to combine a poem by H.H. with a country that is so influenced by the Islamic religion. The gallery of designs with 20 poems is a kind of journey into the world of Islamic art. The next step was to create 20 jewels... twenty poems and 20 designs. This gallery was for the private yacht of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed. I worked on the project in collaboration with artist G. Cozzi.

What is the philosophy behind your designs?

My jewels have an Italian soul. Culture enriches my jewels, which have a solid core. I don't make 'bubble' jewels!

Apart from gold, what other elements do you like to include in your creations?

I love semi-precious gemstones. I also use enamels to create sensorial jewellery.

What kind of jewellery do you like to wear?

I like wearing jewellery that interprets my style for the day, and reflects my inner world.

How often do you unveil your new collections?

Three times in a year.

What are your best-selling jewellery pieces?

The 'Imperial Rome', 'Favourite' and 'Odalisk' collections.

Of all your jewellery collections, which piece do you think every woman should possess and why?

I guess it should be a piece from the 'Imperial Rome' collection because one can feel the spirit of ancient



(Above) The gossamery necklace belongs to the Indian Art Collection by Maria De Toni, and is inspired by boteh or paisley patterns commonly used to decorate Indian royal regalia, crowns, and court garments. The necklace in 18 karat and 21/22 karat yellow gold with tapered boteh designs features drilled embroidery technique that enhances the transparent mirror satin finish of the jewellery. (Right) Maharaja painting with gold leaf by Maria De Toni ©2011



Roman costumes, prestige and nobility through my jewels.

For a jewellery designer of your stature, what is it that sets you apart from others?

My jewels have authentic cultural and historical features created with a contemporary vision.

Do you follow Indian jewellery designs?

I love Indian craftsmanship, and Indian heritage. I am particularly fond of kundan-meena jewellery. I would love to explore the possibilities of an alliance with an Indian company, which could help me launch historical Indian jewellery pieces with modernistic motifs.

What is your design philosophy?

We are all children of the same world. We can create a better world through jewellery by tapping our creativity and a vast pool of talent that is available to us. Our creations should have a soul; they should be eternal in order to give love, which should be our supreme mission in life. ■