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LÉA SEYDOUX

THE LAST TEMPTATION
OF JAMES BOND

You Can't Repeat THE PAST

Unless you use Golconda diamonds and Colombian emeralds and make them new.

BY JILL NEWMAN

Ten and a half million dollars: That's how much a rare ruby and diamond ring by Viren Bhagat fetched at a Sotheby's auction in October 2017. As with most of his pieces, that was way above the estimate. Hailed as India's greatest modern-day jeweler, Bhagat is famous for tracking down historic stones—rare pigeon's-blood rubies, Kashmir sapphires, Colombian emeralds, Golconda diamonds—to set in his masterpieces. So coveted are his creations (he makes only 60 a year) that loyal clients go to his appointment-only Mumbai workshop and purchase designs based on sketches alone.

Last month, at TEFAF Maastricht, the sprawling art, design, and antiques fair in the Netherlands, the elusive jeweler expanded his fan base. In his first public show ever, **Bhagat** unveiled 25 pieces that reflect his signature aesthetic—classic Indian motifs of lotus flowers and paisleys rendered in Art Deco-style lines—but that, for the first time, featured semiprecious stones such as lapis, opal, and turquoise. "Our pieces are feather-light because we make the platinum metal evaporate, allowing the stones to capture the light and shimmer," says the jeweler, who was one of two contemporary designers (the other being JAR by Joel A. Rosenthal) featured in the Al Thani collection, the Qatari royal family's exceptional trove of jewelry and artifacts spanning the last 500 years. Christie's sold 400 pieces from that collection last fall for more than \$100 million.

Since the early 20th century, European jewelry houses have been captivated by the Indian aesthetic. Jacques Cartier was so enamored of what he saw on a visit to Delhi in 1911 that he returned to Paris and began

infusing his designs with colorful gems and a sense of movement that didn't exist in the floral and bow shapes of the Edwardian era. Cartier's iconic Tutti Frutti collection, with its playful explosion of cabochon and carved emeralds, rubies, and sapphires, was born of this India obsession.

The stylistic mingling went in both directions. Indian royals brought trunks of gemstones to Paris for maisons to reimagine in a fusion of Eastern and Western styles, such as when the maharajah of Patiala arrived at the Place Vendôme in 1928 with 566 carats of diamonds and 7,800 carats of emeralds and commissioned Boucheron to make 149 elaborate pieces.

Today the Indian style has evolved in the hands of a new generation. Delhi-based **Hanut Singh** uses Indian stones in Art Deco-esque designs inspired by his own family jewels. **Bina Goenka** modernizes traditional motifs;

Maharajahs, who wore gems to convey power, had symbiotic relationships with Europe's top jewelers.



BHAGAT COLOMBIAN EMERALD, DIAMOND, AND NATURAL PEARL "JIGHA" BROOCH, BHAGAT JEWELLERS.COM

SANJAY KASLIWAL POLKI DIAMOND FLOWER RING IN 22K YELLOW GOLD (\$12,000), 212-988-1511



SANTI GOLCONDA DIAMOND EARRINGS WITH EMERALD PETALS, SANTIJEWELS.COM



BINA GOENKA 18K GOLD, PEARL, AND RUBY EARRINGS, BINAGOENKA.COM



MUNNU THE GEM PALACE PLIQUE-A-JOUR LOTUS RING WITH DIAMONDS IN 18K GOLD (\$48,000), MUNNUTHE GEMPALACE.COM



she set her floral ruby earrings in red rhodium gold, creating the illusion of stones floating in space.

Sabyasachi Mukherjee's jewelry, which is now at Bergdorf's, alludes to his childhood in culture-rich Calcutta. Siddharth Kasliwal, the ninth-generation steward of **Munnu the Gem Palace**, pairs old Indian stones with bold enamel, while Jaipur's Krishna Choudhary, whose family has been trading Golconda diamonds for more than a century, designed his first collection, **Santi**, using historic gems purchased from India's noble families. **Sanjay Kasliwal's** children are carrying on the family legacy with eclectic designs (think bohemian necklaces dripping with cabochon stones), and **Chand Bihari Saboo's** sons are evolving the company founded by their father in 1935 by procuring the rarest gems from mines around the world.

The flamboyant history, the mouth-watering color, the striking design—how can anyone, then or now, resist? **T&C**