

OUR 48 FAVORITE FAMILIES

TOWN & COUNTRY

NOVEMBER 2019

The
\$400
MILLION
CALIFORNIA
HORSE FEUD

CAN MONEY
BUY YOU
SLEEP?

NEPOTISM
A User's Guide

ITALIAN
ARISTOS
How to Dress the Part



"I Will Not NOT Be Rich!"

LAURA DERN

WHY SHE'S THE
WOMAN OF THE YEAR

4 JOIN the Family Business

BY JILL NEWMAN

While most little girls played dress-up with plastic tiaras, Valérie Messika was having fun with the real thing. “My father used to give me a handful of diamonds and ask, ‘Which do you like best and why?’” But it wasn’t just child’s play. André Messika was training Valérie to run the business he started nearly 50 years ago. The diamond trade is largely controlled by a small number of families, with multimillion-dollar transactions often sealed with just a handshake, and these Old World customs are passed down from one generation to the next.

Did Valérie feel pressure to join the family business? “Absolutely,” says the Paris-born and -raised 43-year-old. “How could I refuse my father?” After a year in Chanel Fine Jewelry’s marketing department, she obliged. She traveled to India, South Africa, and Israel with her father to learn the inner workings of this secretive universe, but it quickly became apparent that she saw diamonds not as a commodity but as the foundation for striking designs. In 2005 she persuaded her father to support her namesake marque. This went against the diamond dealer code; he feared that competing with the brands he supplied could jeopardize his own business. But Valérie didn’t intend to compete—she wanted to transform the language of diamond jewelry entirely.

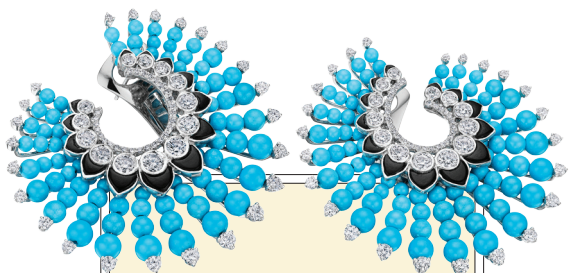
Mission accomplished. “There’s a certain cool attitude and unexpected flair in Messika that I don’t find in other fine jewelry,” says celebrity stylist Kate Young. Valérie has drawn on her passion for street style, fashion, and her father’s kinetic Calder sculptures to

reimagine diamond jewelry. The Skinny collection, made with nanospring technology, features flexible pieces that feel like a second skin; her Move series has diamonds in cages that sparkle and slide on necklaces and earrings. Even statement pieces like the new Tumbleweed necklace from her Born to Be Wild collection, which is set with 30 carats of rare quality yellow cushion diamonds, appear light and airy without any visible metal settings.

Family dinners still involve talk of diamonds, but Valérie says it doesn’t feel like work because it’s “a passion we all share.” These days, when her five- and seven-year-old daughters visit the office, they aren’t playing with stones, they’re sketching jewelry designs, mapping out plans for the next generation. **T&C**



One bright feather turns a diamond necklace into a playful masterstroke inspired by the Native American dream catcher. **MESSIKA PARIS** DIAMOND CATCHER NECKLACE (\$119,000), MESSIKA.COM



MAKE IT NEW

After three generations of dealing in vintage treasures, Lee Siegelson wrote another chapter for his family’s firm. His crescent earrings were made this year, but their alluring combination of turquoise, onyx, and diamonds evokes the past. **SIEGELSON** EARRINGS (\$40,000), SIEGELSON.COM