



From far left: Nuno Brandolini, Fiona Druckenmiller and Brandolini's wife Muriel at the FD Gallery in New York.
From top: c1860 gold, silver, diamond and ruby bird brooch, \$45,000. c1970 Bulgari gold and Roman coin necklace, similar from \$15,000. c1930s platinum, diamond and sapphire ring, \$78,200

FINDERS KEEPERS

rare vintage jewellery

A chance encounter with a long-lost acquaintance-turned-dealer became the making of an Italian financier's seminal jewellery collection for his wife, says Vivienne Becker. Portrait by Nicholas Calcott

For both Nuno Brandolini, managing director of private equity firm Independence Holding Partners and co-founder and chairman of Scorpion Capital Partners, and New York-based jewellery dealer Fiona Druckenmiller, jewellery is very much a family affair. They first met some 20 years ago when their children were at the same pre-school in New York City. They connected immediately, recalls Brandolini, as they both worked in finance: Druckenmiller was a successful investment banker before embarking on a second career as a dealer in antique and 20th-century

jewellery, opening her FD Gallery on New York's east side seven years ago. They met again in 2012, when the daughter of Nuno and his interior designer wife Muriel "came out" at Paris's Bal des Débutantes, for which FD Gallery was that year the official jeweller. "I discovered Fiona's wonderful shop," says Nuno. "It reignited my own passion for jewellery and I took advantage of her taste and expertise to shape the collection I'd started to build when I first met my wife."

Brandolini's interest in jewellery began in childhood, as his mother, Countess Cristiana Brandolini d'Adda (née Agnelli),

always wore exquisite jewels – some family heirlooms, others acquired from jewellers, including IAR, in Paris; the first piece he ever gave his wife was an antique diamond Maltese cross pendant that had belonged to her. "My parents had very good taste in objects, including a Fabergé collection. A love of beautiful things is in my blood," says Brandolini. Guided by Druckenmiller, he has refined this affinity through jewellery. He buys mainly for Muriel, visiting the gallery several times a year, where Druckenmiller puts together a carefully edited selection for him. "Fiona has been instrumental in shaping my taste. Her input is invaluable,

especially in identifying which designs from a particular house or maker are one-of-a-kind or very rare. In terms of investment and forming an interesting collection, this is vitally important."

Collector and dealer share an eclectic taste that runs the gamut of styles and periods, from late-18th- and 19th-century naturalistic jewels, through rigorously architectural art deco and on to bold 20th-century creations by names such as Suzanne Belperron and Cartier and masterpieces by individual designer-jewellers such as Taffin by James de Givenchy. "Period is not so important to me," says Brandolini. "Design is the

first thing I look for; the second most important element is the stones. Perhaps I'll be attracted by a particularly beautiful sapphire or ruby. But I do have to buy jewels that Muriel will wear," he adds, "not just put away in a safe."

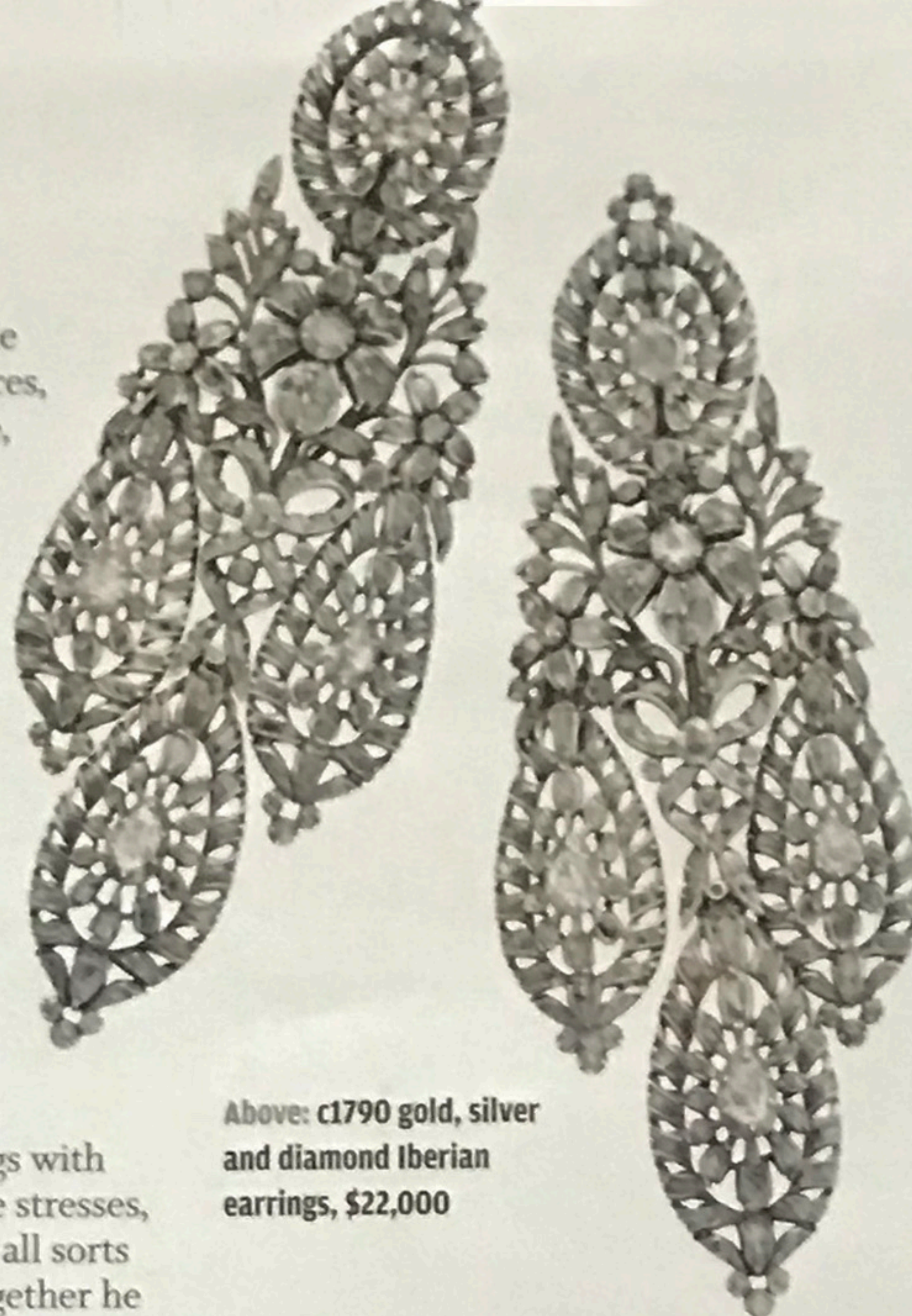
Over the years, he has acquired "at least 50 pieces" from FD Gallery. The first, he recalls, was a sculptural and striking 19th-century diamond and ruby brooch (\$45,000, pictured on previous page) designed as a bird. "It's like a painting come to life," he says. He also singles out a 19th-century snake bracelet (\$36,000), its two entwined serpents, with cabochon ruby eyes, set entirely with antique-cut diamonds mounted in silver and gold; and two art deco rings – one (\$25,650) with a central, 2.15ct marquise diamond framed in calibre-cut onyx set in platinum; the other (\$78,200, pictured on previous page), an impressive step-cut diamond of over 5ct bordered with calibre-cut sapphires.

Brandolini admires the way in which Druckenmiller puts different styles and periods together – "I would never wear a matching suite of jewellery," she says – and takes the same slightly bohemian approach: antique Iberian earrings (\$22,000, pictured above right), for example, with a contemporary ring (\$48,000) by Hemmerle, its central aquamarine of 18.22ct flanked by triangular-cut tsavorites, creating an arresting juxtaposition of blue and

green, and set in blackened iron and white gold.

While Muriel Brandolini's style might shape her husband's choices, he always visits the gallery alone, says Druckenmiller. "He knows exactly what he wants and whatever he chooses is always a surprise." Although, she adds, there are some differences in taste to be navigated. "I know Muriel would love an emerald, for instance, while Nuno's favourite stone is a sapphire." And Brandolini feels his wife's collection is lacking bracelets.

For Brandolini, visits to FD Gallery are as much pleasure as business. He lives and works nearby, and often brings his dogs with him, having a cup of tea and, he stresses, stimulating conversation about all sorts of things, not just jewellery. Together he and Druckenmiller compare auction prices, look at laboratory certificates for stones, assess style, design and maker, and discuss provenance. "The pieces don't necessarily have to be signed," she explains, "unless they're contemporary, in which case knowing the designer or artist is crucial." Brandolini favours Bulgari, so recently Druckenmiller has been guiding him towards seminal Bulgari jewels of the 1970s and early 1980s, with their voluptuous volumes



Above: c1790 gold, silver and diamond Iberian earrings, \$22,000

and casual opulence, springy tubogas and fluid gold chains (example pictured on previous page, similar from \$15,000) set with Roman coins.

Both collector and dealer know that in a competitive market, sourcing jewels of the right stature, quality and rarity becomes more challenging every year. Signed 20th-century jewels, in particular, are diminishing in supply, says Druckenmiller, as wealth grows around the world and

with it an appreciation of rare period jewels; she notes that those by Van Cleef & Arpels and Cartier have doubled in price. Brandolini admires her resourcefulness and extensive global network of contacts, so vital in sourcing fresh-to-the-market pieces. While jewels of important provenance often surface at auction, Druckenmiller tries to buy as much as possible privately – family jewels sold discreetly – and also has close relationships with contemporary artist-jewellers, such as Hemmerle, Sabba and Viren Bhagat, the master of Mumbai, whose work she exhibits annually in her gallery.

But she and Brandolini agree that antique and vintage jewels are considerably undervalued compared to modern jewellery. "Antique jewels were handmade, the diamonds hand-cut, and they are often set with the finest coloured gems from mines that have long been depleted. Most are one-of-a-kind, or one of very few. It's still possible to find a beautiful antique jewel in the \$10,000-\$15,000 range." This tantalising possibility, along with trust, respect and friendship, keeps Brandolini coming back to FD Gallery for spectacular jewels to give to his wife. Druckenmiller says: "Trust is the crucial factor, and the best client is one who comes back year after year. It's a win-win for both of us." ♦

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