



The JEWELS to BUY NOW

Fiona Druckenmiller's FD Gallery is the place to find investment pieces that will last a lifetime

WALKING INTO THE FD GALLERY is an experience not unlike walking into the life-size manifestation of your ideal jewelry box—an intimate, welcoming space dedicated almost exclusively to the brilliance of stones and metal, filled with spectacular unique pieces and rare estate finds. Indeed, to call it simply a “store” fails to do it justice; “gallery” is the proper word.

Such was the vision of owner Fiona Druckenmiller when she opened FD Gallery six years ago on a discreet block of East 65th Street, off Madison Avenue, in New York. A former Wall Street portfolio manager, the Manhattan native found herself with her youngest daughter off to college and a desire to try a new path. “I wanted to do something that was more a celebration and work-

ing with beauty,” she says. With her passion for jewelry collecting as the perfect solution, she set out to create a destination for exquisite baubles that only she could offer. “The thought is that if you’re paying a lot of money for jewelry, it should be one-of-a-kind,” she explains. “If you walk down the street and someone else is wearing the same piece, it’s not that special. We stock really curated pieces.”

So curated, in fact, that several of the designers are exclusive to the store in the U.S. Such is the case for Sabba, a contemporary line by the Italian-born, Paris-based Alessandro Sabbatini, who specializes in elaborate designs—shoulder-grazing chandelier earrings done in faceted amber and diamonds; a ring with a half-moon-shaped diamond and a band with inset rubies. Some are made ►

Bhagat earrings. FD Gallery; 212-772-2440.



with titanium, allowing for a surprising lightness to each piece. "As pretty as they are, they're also very technically advanced," says Druckenmiller. "It's kind of phenomenal that at the age of 29 he has the following and the collectors that he does, as well as this technical prowess. We've been carrying him for about two years, and every time we get something new it surpasses the last thing." Says Sabbatini of his designs, "Femininity" is the key word of my jewelry. I want women to feel as beautiful wearing one of my pieces as they would wearing a beautiful couture dress."



Hemmerle earrings. FD Gallery, 212-772-2440.

FD Gallery also exclusively carries Bhagat, a line by a family-owned jewelry house based in Mumbai and headed by Viren Bhagat, who is widely hailed as India's top contemporary jeweler and whose work has been exhibited at the Kremlin, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, and London's Victoria and Albert Museum;

he also has an upcoming show at the Louvre. "Their approach to diamonds is quite unique to what we see from American designers and stone-cutters," says Druckenmiller. Bhagat often employs a cut called the flat rose to illustrate the multidimensional aspect of a flower petal, and the tavit cut—also known as the Shah Jahan table cut—which are distinctive features of traditional Indian Mughal design.

Rounding out the store's exclusive brands are Nadia Morgenthaler and Hemmerle. Morgenthaler, a Swiss jeweler, launched a namesake line in 2013 after studying at the École d'Arts Appliqués in Geneva and spending more than 20 years working for leading jewelry houses like Chopard. She specializes in small collections that emphasize movement and incorporate natural pearls, spinels, and blackened gold. Conversely, Hemmerle is far from a new name in the fine-jewelry world but rather a family-owned company founded in 1893 and now in its fourth generation. The production of each one-off piece (about 300 are created a year, and sold only at FD Gallery and at the house's Munich shop) is overseen by Stefan and Sylveli Hemmerle, along with their son, Christian, and daughter-in-law, Yasmin. "Their aesthetic traditionally has been to set precious stones in not-so-precious metals," says Druckenmiller. "So they'll do a diamond in iron, a Colombian emerald in copper, or diamond hoops in aluminum. A lot of clients just love their work because it's not so precious."

In addition to the contemporary designers, FD Gallery has a large vintage offering, composed primarily of signed pieces from the early

to mid-20th century by such iconic names as Cartier, Bulgari, Verdura, and Van Cleef & Arpels. The goal is to show off the rarest designs from the most prolific period of each house's history. "I mix and match my jewelry, combining different materials and designers, as well as periods," Druckenmiller says. "I like to wear my old with my new, as my tastes in jewelry aren't at all linear."

If I had to pick a bygone period I favor, I would have to say I hold a special place for exceptional Deco pieces."

As for what makes a good find for Druckenmiller—contemporary or estate—she says that value is just as important as design. "Most of the stuff you buy at a department store, if you went to sell it on 47th Street, you would get 5 or 10 percent of what you paid for it," she explains. "We wanted to have pieces that would hold, if not 100 percent of their value, a lot of their value over time. Things change, circumstances change, and, quite honestly, I always feel like when I give my daughters a piece of jewelry, I want them to know what the value is in case they ever want to buy a car or have a down payment on a house. Yes, they are beautiful, but pieces like this are energy, and you can always convert them to something else."

With her extensive knowledge of the rarest treasures and up-and-coming designers, Druckenmiller offers an experience built on discovery—and without a hint of pretension. "I've always felt that a lot of the places on Madison and Fifth avenues were either intimidating or a bit stuffy," she says. "My mother always said that if she had to replace the battery in her watch, she would go and get a blow-dry before she went to the store. I would say, 'Mom, you're a customer.'"

With the gallery, we wanted people to feel comfortable."

Later this year, FD Gallery will be moving to a brand-new location, a townhouse on East 80th Street between Madison and Fifth. "The current space is too small for us," says Druckenmiller. Despite the larger venue, however, she insists that the gallery won't lose the intimate setting it has become known for. "Each floor will have a very residential feeling," she says. "There will be the same salon kind of feeling. The reopening is just a continuation of our space now."

It's a safe bet that the store's loyal customer base will follow, as Druckenmiller will continue to put her devotees' convenience front and center. "If a husband is working a lot and traveling a lot, we can e-mail him images," she says. "If customers see something they like, we can send them the piece on approval, since a lot of them are too busy to come in. And, frankly, we close at 5:30, and a lot of people aren't off work at 5:30. We want them to be happy. We make an effort, and it's worth it." **Lauren McCarthy**



Nadia Morgenthaler ring, \$12,000. FD Gallery.



Sabba ring. FD Gallery.