



Clockwise from left: Christian and Stefan Hemmerle at home; Hemmerle's 18k white gold, black iron and aquamarine ring, 18k red gold, moonstone, amethyst and sapphire brooch, and 18k white gold, red patinated copper, spinel and amethyst earrings, prices available upon request, at Hemmerle, 011.800.2422.6000.



The Good Germans

The Hemmerles, Munich's first family of jewelry, design baubles that are truly one of a kind.

Photographs by STEFAN KORTE

It's not every client request that inspires a designer to branch off into a direction he never before imagined—and subsequently to develop an entirely new style in doing so. But that's exactly how the German jewelry house Hemmerle came to enjoy its current status as one of today's most inventive and sought-after jewelers.

It all began in 1995, when a prominent Munich art collector commissioned Stefan Hemmerle, a third-generation jeweler, to create a birthday present for his wife, a woman who detested flashy gems. In fact, she wore only Berlin iron jewelry, a 19th-century style that developed during the Napoleonic Wars, when German citizens donated their gold to the war effort and wore iron reproductions instead.

Stefan's design, an iron and diamond ring, not only won over the client but inspired the designer to experiment with the temperamental and utterly common metal. "I fell in love with the idea, and I started to make a small collection," says Stefan, a tall, distinguished 60-year-old with piercing blue eyes. "People love that simplicity—the combination of white, gray and brown diamonds and textured iron. It was the beginning of this metalwork in our collection."

Fast-forward 12 years and the Hemmerle look has expanded far beyond iron. The house, which produces an estimated

230 pieces of *haute joaillerie* each year in its 12-artisan Munich workshop, is renowned for its austere architectural settings rendered in unorthodox materials including copper, stainless steel, brass, aluminum and rare woods, and for its use of exquisitely cut colored gemstones. The heaviness of a masculine charcoal-hued iron band, for instance, only enhances the sharp angles of an emerald-cut 40-carat electric blue aquamarine ring, while the warm hues of orange and red patinated copper perfectly complement a pair of earrings' berry-colored amethyst and rubellite drops. An iron and diamond samurai warrior brooch even features a body carved from the milky-colored tagua nut, a by-product of a South American palm tree also known as vegetable ivory.

"Our jewelry is unique," notes Christian Hemmerle, 26, Stefan's son and protégé. "You have a lot of people who admire it, and then you have some who don't appreciate it at all. There are definitely some people in this world who say, 'Why would I want to wear unprecious material?' A hundred years ago it was forbidden in France to mix gold and unprecious materials, so our product would have been forbidden."

Though Hemmerle has reached new creative heights over the past 12 years, its 114-year history is rooted in more traditional fare. In 1893 brothers Joseph and



Thanks to the complexity of materials with which Hemmerle works, its designs are impossible to copy.



EARRINGS: DOUG ROSA



The Good Germans

From top: Hemmerle's 18k white gold, patinated copper and green and pink tourmaline earrings, and 18k white gold, patinated copper, garnet, rubellite and amethyst earrings, prices available upon request, at Hemmerle, 011.800.2422.6000.

Anton Hemmerle took over a jewelry business that manufactured medals for Bavarian royalty. Within a few years, Luitpold, Prince Regent of Bavaria, appointed the house an official purveyor to the court. After moving to its current location on Munich's famous shopping strip Maximilianstrasse in 1904, the business grew to include silver, military ornaments, antique jewelry and, following World War II, the production of classical jewelry. But it wasn't until 1971, when the third generation, Stefan and his brother, Franz, took the reins, that Hemmerle began to seriously develop its jewelry collection. A trained gold- and silversmith, Stefan, the creative design force behind the company, began forging the Hemmerle style, an aesthetic inspired by nature, the Bauhaus and Neue Sachlichkeit, the 1920s German art movement that emphasized functionality and objectivism. In 1995 Stefan and his wife, Sylveli, became the sole owners of Hemmerle, when Franz, who ran the business side, bowed out, though Stefan says it was an amicable parting.

Today Hemmerle remains a family affair. While Stefan still helms both design and sales (and is renowned for having a sketchbook permanently attached to his hand), he is grooming Christian to take over the business one day. The duo venture together on gemstone-buying and sales trips, often accompanied by Christian's wife, Yasmin, who previously worked for a diamond dealer. Sylveli, meanwhile, is the organizational taskmaster as well as the color expert. "My wife has phenomenal taste in color. She is not a designer, but she has a great eye," Stefan says. Christian agrees, noting of his mother that "you could have 100 shades of pink, and she could combine one with the perfect shade of blue." Sylveli also developed the tassel earring, a signature look for Hemmerle, which she originally fashioned in diamonds for herself.

In fact, much of the design is done as a family. "We create a lot as a team together. We sit down and have different ideas for things, and we discuss them through with our workers," Christian says.

Stefan recalls a February stone-buying trip to the annual gem fair in Tucson, Arizona. "We found these gems," he says, ticking off a 33-carat salmon pink spinel from Tajikistan, a 35-carat precious brown topaz, and olive green sphene stones. "On the way back to our hotel, I was sketching in the back of the car with my daughter-in-law. We

immediately had wonderful ideas, and that evening we sat down by the pool area and sketched the whole collection."

Jewelry adviser Patricia Hambrecht, who has known the Hemmerles for seven years, believes the collaborative family dynamic is key to their success. "Stefan and Sylveli have complementary skills, which makes them a very formidable team," she says, describing Sylveli as the detail-oriented perfectionist and Stefan as the creative one who loves stones. Hemmerle's work, she adds, is not only "instantly recognizable" and "beautifully made," but thanks to the complexity of materials with which the house works, practically impossible to copy, a quality that only heightens its appeal to the jewelry connoisseur interested in owning a one-of-a-kind piece. Hambrecht says that several of her clients who consider themselves JAR-heads (as in only buying the one-off designs of Paris jeweler Joel A. Rosenthal) have been swayed by the German house's designs of late. "I recently met another client who said, 'We used to admire JAR, but now all we want to wear is Hemmerle.'"

While Hemmerle has been to some extent an industry darling beloved by dealers and a sophisticated clientele largely made up of contemporary-art collectors in the U.S., Germany and Austria, its profile is on the rise. In November Die Neue Sammlung, the State Museum of Applied Arts and Design in Munich, honored Stefan with an exhibition of the house's work. The museum showcased 145 pieces, many on loan from collectors, in an installation designed by Dutch architect Tom Postma. An estimated 30,000 people visited the exhibit, which was accompanied by the release of *Jewels Today: Seen by Stefan Hemmerle*, a coffee-table tome featuring 85 pieces and sketches from the past 20 years.

And this fall the Serpentine Gallery in London plans to host a sales exhibition of Hemmerle designs. Sixty new creations will be on display, including objects ranging from bowls to consoles made from such materials as jasper and rock crystal.

Until then, family members will continue doing what they do best: collaborating, spanning the globe on the hunt for the perfect gemstone specimens and, of course, designing. As Stefan says, "Other people read books or exercise for pleasure. I sketch. I sketch. It's my kind of yoga."

—ALISON BURWELL

