



HEMMERLE

The Hemmerle family are used to the pretty and the glittery: according to Christian (*left*) – at 29, their youngest member – in the 19th century they tended to Bavaria's crown jewels, and for many years after re-tailed high-end diamond jewellery from their Munich shop. Then, in the late 1990s, Stefan Hemmerle, Christian's father, had an epiphany. A client asked him to design some pieces for his wife, who, somewhat forbiddingly, "didn't like jewellery". The result – a torque of thick black iron, set at the ends with two huge, mismatched diamonds – broke all the rules and set the family firm on an entirely new course. "It was like a door opening," Christian says, his voice whispery with excitement. "All these ideas flooded through."

The four Hemmerles – father, mother Sylveli, Christian and, latterly, his tiny-boned, decorative Egyptian wife, Yasmin – have spent the years since riding that flood. Though these days Christian clearly leads the way, they design as a team, producing about 400 unique pieces a year, studding bases of wood or oxidised metal with sweetie-like stones in arty, back-to-front colours: black jade, amber moonstones, lime-green garnets. There's a tension in their

work between an almost Wagnerian heroic formality and a more eastern lushness that I suspect comes from Yasmin: one minute they might set a large, cut aquamarine of an Aryan blue into an iron bangle of fierce single-mindedness, the next twist hundreds of tiny, polished carnelian beads into a bejewelled rope finished with polished ends of thuja wood.

In pictures, these pieces can appear a little remote; with prices averaging from €5,000-40,000 that's perhaps not surprising. Yet in the (stony, woody) flesh they have warmth and a surprisingly tactile appeal. You want to stroke them, weigh them in your palm, put them on, and not take them off.

Christian is delighted to hear it. The Hemmerle family's work may have been considered intellectually stimulating enough to be exhibited at the notoriously discerning Neue Sammlung, Munich's museum of design, but Christian just wants you to wear it. "Our jewellery is meant to be on the body," he smiles, as polished as a pair of his own coral cufflinks. "Then it can grow and develop. If a customer says to me I want to buy a piece to wear once and then put it in a safe, I will tell them to give it back and go away."

From top: copper, white gold and tourmaline earrings; coral, copper and pink gold bangles; white gold ring with copper, spinel and sapphires; all prices on application, via www.hemmerle.com

Courtesy of Hemmerle and Steffen Korte

