

A new generation is making its mark at Hemmerle. **Stephanie Sporn** discovers why detail is everything for the celebrated jewellery house



(Above and opposite) Hemmerle's pepper brooch, comprised of demantoid garnets, copper, silver and white gold, from the Delicious Jewels collection; and an ancient Egyptian faience necklace, the faience from 18th-dynasty ancient Egypt, Amarna period, 1352–36 BC

FAMILY SECRETS

At Hemmerle, family business has become an art. Over four generations, the company has preserved its high standard of unhurried craftsmanship and artisanal excellence. Stefan and Sylveli Hemmerle currently run the house, along with their son Christian and daughter-in-law Yasmin, who met at university in London and began working for the company in 2006. According to Christian, good instinct has always been at the root of Hemmerle's success. "For my parents' generation, it was not so much about strategy," he says. "They just made very good gut decisions which led them to where we are today."

Hemmerle produces about 200 pieces a year. Each can take up to 500 hours to make, and all are created in-house in Munich, where the company's sole boutique is also located. In 1893, brothers Joseph and Anton Hemmerle founded the firm there, upon taking over an established goldsmith's operation. Two years later, Hemmerle was appointed "Purveyor to the Court" by Luitpold, Prince Regent of Bavaria, and it soon became known for its "bejewelled fantasies" – a description that holds true today. In the 1970s, Stefan Hemmerle modernised the company by taking it in a design-driven direction, which integrated unusual materials, such as iron and wood, with its precious gems.

In 2019, Christian and Yasmin continue to usher in a new era at Hemmerle. They cater to an increasingly international clientele and innovate in their designs using unconventional objects found in nature, such as acorns from

New York's Central Park and pebbles from Munich's Isar River. Stones range from diamonds and jade to tsavorites and melo pearl. "My dad never looked at materials by value. He just looked at beauty," says Christian. "He taught us to walk around with an open mind and get inspired. Obviously diamonds and rubies are more precious than tourmalines, but tourmalines can be just as beautiful."

As Christian and Yasmin take on more responsibility at Hemmerle, and as the firm's presence at fairs, museums and auctions skyrockets, it is clear that Stefan's playful imagination and passion for beauty are not the only attributes that have influenced the couple. Rather, it is his sense of conviction that empowers their steadfast belief that increased demand should not compromise their bespoke process. "Our pieces are taking more and more time to create because we are extremely detail driven," explains Yasmin. "We believe that it's the last 5% of the workmanship that really makes the jewel."

As evidenced by their designs, ranging from Paul Klee-inspired geometric earrings to necklaces that incorporate ancient artefacts, art is a major inspiration for Christian and Yasmin. Institutions have noticed too, with The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and the Cooper-Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York all counting Hemmerle jewels in their collections. Christian, who also sits on TEFAF's Board of Trustees, recalls a



COURTESY, HEMMERLE

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(Top and above)
Hemmerle earrings made of
blackened silver, white gold
and diamonds, inspired by
Paul Klee; and Yasmin and
Christian Hemmerle

recent trip to the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, and his surprise seeing works by the Dutch master alongside those by American sculptor John Chamberlain. “There were so many years between the two, but it showed me that everybody gets inspired by their surroundings,” he says of the exhibition. “Hemmerle’s challenge today is to take just a small, abstract element of something, whether it’s a shape or a colour palette, and reinterpret it in our work.”

While some Hemmerle jewels prioritise colour and clean lines in striking designs, such as their signature Harmony bangle, other pieces contemporize history. Their Egyptian Story collection, for example, was sparked by the Hemmerle family’s visit to Cairo to meet Yasmin’s family. Inspired by ancient Egypt’s reverence for jewellery, Hemmerle created pieces based around materials like turquoise, motifs such as scarabs (dung beetles), and artefacts including faiences and amulets, to pay homage to the country’s distinct visual vocabulary. And last year, for its 125th anniversary, Hemmerle created several jewels, called Revived Treasures, such as a necklace (previous page) featuring a faience from Egypt’s

Amarna Period, 1352–36 BC, from which emeralds and sapphires hang on a flexible strap of hand-sewn agate beads knitted over silk.

Other Hemmerle jewels serve as reminders of the house’s regard for whimsy. Take for example its Tarantula brooch. Comprised of yellow gold, diamonds, sapphires and conch pearl, the piece is captivating in its radiance, as well as in its highly realistic form, down to the chill-inducing texture of its furry legs. In their 2011 Delicious Jewels project, Christian and Yasmin designed a collection that took the form of vegetables. A book of the same name was also published, featuring recipes by food writer Tamasin Day-Lewis alongside the jewels. But don’t ask Christian and Yasmin to pick their favourite piece. “Like with kids, even if you have a favourite child, you don’t share it because it would do the others injustice,” explains Christian. But if you ask him which project best represents his and Yasmin’s contribution to the heritage brand, he concedes, “Definitely our Delicious Jewels. It’s important not to be too serious. Life needs humour.” ■

Stephanie Sporn is a staff writer for sothebys.com