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Dutch Sisters Create Jewels Inspired By Indian Culture



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Fleur and Noëlle Van Gelder, owners of Van Gelder Indian Jewelry, based in The Netherlands

BARBARA KIEBOOM

Van Gelder Indian Jewelry is one of those businesses that at first glance defy logic. The Dutch family-owned firm specializes in museum quality heritage jewels from India, painstakingly acquired through complex networks inside the subcontinent over many years.

The company [was founded in 1980](#) by Dutch native Bernadette van Gelder, who, through personal research, became captivated by the history, art and regional cultures of India expressed in its jewelry as well as the materials and techniques used to create the historic pieces. She and her late husband, Wim Brouwer, then traveled to the subcontinent. Viewing the historic jewels in person turned her fascination into an obsession. In the years that followed they traveled extensively visiting jewelry workshops and talking to dealers and collectors, gradually gaining their trust and eventually amassing a collection of important, historic jewels. The venture that ensued became one of the world's most important collectors and traders of historic Indian jewels, attracting clients throughout the world. The company was one of the original exhibitors at TEFAF Maastricht, the prestigious international fine art, antiques and design fair held annually in southern Netherlands.

Bernadette's daughters, Noëlle and Fleur, grew up in the business learning about Indian jewels and accompanying their parents to the subcontinent multiple times. In 2000 the sisters joined the firm and in 2012 became the owners, when their mother retired. For a while the company ran as it always had. However, with a new generation change is inevitable. In 2019, they created their own contemporary jewels based on historic Indian jewelry. The next year they opened an appointment-only boutique in 's-Hertogenbosch, a city in the center of the Netherlands.



The Baoli 18k and 22k gold ring with a cabochon blue sapphire by Van Gelder Indian Jewelry VAN GELDER INDIAN JEWELRY

Tall, thin and blond and nearly identical in appearance, no one would ever mistake the two sisters for having Indian lineage. But what they did inherit from their Dutch parents is the same passion for historic Indian jewels as well as a sense of pride for their unique business. “We created a super-niche market and we never regretted it,” Fleur said. “We are very well known in this niche.”

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So far, they have created five contemporary jewelry collections. All of

the limited-edition pieces within the collections are designed by the sisters based on Indian themes and all are crafted in a workshop in Jaipur, India. The sisters describe the jewels as cotemporary versions of Indian pieces that are colorful, petite and refined. Each collection is influenced by a specific aspect of India's history and culture. It reflects their passion for traditional Indian jewelry, combined with their personal perspective and modern interpretation of the rich Indian visual and cultural language.



The newest Baoli 18k gold ring by Van Gelder Indian Jewelry VAN GELDER INDIAN JEWELRY

Baoli is latest collection, influenced by the stepwells of India (which

date from 600 BC in Gujarat), and the concept of running, trickling water used in ceremonies and rituals. The sisters have walked down these stepwells (known as Baoli in Hindi) and describe it as an almost spiritual experience.

“These architectural structures are erected around wells where there is a scarcity of water. These wells were often part of a temple and the community would gather around these water wells to pray,” Fleur said. “As you walk down the whole atmosphere changes as the mist increases and you lose light. That spirituality and the beautiful patterns of the steps was an appealing concept to us.”

The collection comprises 18k gold rings and earrings, decorated with enamel, blue sapphire, labradorite, lapis lazuli, pink tourmaline and spinel. In most cases there is a replication of the steps with a gemstone in the center of the piece. In addition to the traditional Indian theme, they compare the pieces to the mathematically influenced optical illusions of modern Dutch graphic designer, M.C. Escher.

“The clarity of the gemstone in the center is an endless source of inspiration,” Noëlle said. “We hope we can invite the wearer to look inside as an endless source of inspiration.”



Jali double finger gold ring in a layered lattice decor by Van Gelder Indian Jewelry VAN GELDER
INDIAN JEWELRY

Another collection, Jali, is the term for a perforated stone or a lattice screen, according to the sisters, usually with an ornamental pattern constructed through the use of calligraphy and geometry. These patterns and floral designs cast long decorative shadows on walls and the floors. They serve a practical function as well, helping to lower the temperature by tempering sunlight and compressing air through the holes.

“The designs also have strong and intriguing visual structures,” Noëlle said. “This shielding screen inspired us to create jewelry that is strong yet delicate in appearance.”



Colors malachite drop ear pendants by Van Gelder Indian Jewelry VAN GELDER INDIAN JEWELRY

Another collection of note is Colors. “We tried to capture the colors of India in a series of clean, natural lines and with gemstones,” Fleur said. “We started with clean and strong lines in the forms of traditional Indian jewelry.”

Organic shapes also play an important role in this collection as the pieces are graphic translations of flowers and water jugs that are typical of India. The drop gold earrings, necklace and rings are enhanced with colorful gemstones and enameling.

The Jodha Bai collection is named after a 16th century Rajput princess who was the wife of Mughal emperor, Akbar the Great. She is widely regarded as exemplifying Akbar’s and the Mughals’ tolerance of religious differences and their inclusive policies within an expanding multi-ethnic and multi-denominational empire. She is also said to be

equal to men in love, life and battle. The designs of these expressive pieces reflect these traits with strong, distinct lines, using enamel and gold. For example, a pair of long earrings has a spherical end decorated with a filigree floral design and protruding spikes, reassembling a weapon.



Jodha Bai 18k gold ear pendants with protruding spikes by Van Gelder Indian Jewelry VAN GELDER INDIAN JEWELRY

The Navaratna Collection represents the nine planets of the Indian astrological system with ruby, pearl, coral, emerald, topaz, diamond, sapphire, zircon and cat's eye.

“The nine stones as a group are said to possess exceptional magic powers by providing a sympathetic medium for the transmission of stored energy from the planets, which then casts its influence on the wearer,” Fleur said.

These contemporary collections represent a dramatic change in the nature of the family business. It also meant that the firm would leave TEFAF Maastricht since their contemporary pieces are not aligned with the rules and regulations of the annual fair, known for its rigorous vetting. But the sisters have expressed confidence in their vision and they have the approval of their mother.

“When we decided we wanted to start a contemporary collection there was no longer a place for us at TEFAF, so we went our separate ways,” Fleur said. “Businesswise it was a very good decision. It was the right decision.”

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