

DESIGNER



From left: The making of a ring; Ciottoli necklace from the new Isola dei Pescatori collection; drawing of a diamond front bodice from 1908; ring from the Graphic collection.

LINKS IN A CHAIN

The CEO of high jeweler Mellerio dits Meller talks about her label's five-century heritage and its latest offerings. By Marie Chabrol



Laure-Isabelle Mellerio, CEO and creative director of Mellerio dits Meller.

French high-jewelry house Mellerio dits Meller is one of the world's oldest jewelers, with roots in the 16th century. Laure-Isabelle Mellerio, the company's CEO and creative director, reflects on that past and shares her own inspirations.

How do you manage Mellerio and the legacy of one of the oldest jewelry houses in the world?

The Mellerio house is a family home, and this is a very important point. So we have

a very long-term vision, since the house is not intended to be sold and must remain in our family. The next generation has four boys, one of whom, Côme, already works with us.

Also, while profitability is still essential, we do not face the same pressure as young brands or houses, whose shareholders expect a quick return on their investments.

Add to this the fact that it is a very elegant house with a unique soul. It is therefore necessary to pay homage to all the Mellerio [family], but also to the employees, to the workshop managers and to the [skilled] craftsmen who know how to retain our customers. Leading this house requires a persistent kindness to maintain the loyalty that we have enjoyed for so long.

How does Mellerio's heritage inspire its contemporary creations?

I am often asked if our heritage is a burden. But on the contrary, I find it tremendously inspiring and exciting. There is a [trend to] return to heritage, and it is one of our strengths, because we have never forgotten it. Also, if I were to lack inspiration, I [would] only have to go down to the archives to draw ideas. My latest collections are nourished by this story. That said, having studied drawing and with a background in interior design, I always wanted to respect the codes of the houses with which I worked. It is the same dynamic that guides me here: to learn, then to note the recurring elements and rework them without distorting them.

Would you say some of your creations are now iconic?

This is a difficult question because my main goal is to perpetuate the spirit of the house. But I remember a client who told me after seeing my first collection that I had preserved the Mellerio spirit. So I told myself that I had met the challenge and it was the best compliment that [I] could be given. The Mellerio spirit is the freedom to create and propose. Our jewelry remains timeless [and] elegant and does not go out of style. This is perhaps our specialty, and that is the house's iconic character.

Do you use historic in-house techniques?

Of course, even if many [of those] techniques are found in other houses. But here we try to sustain the use of enamel, for example, to which I am very attached. I regularly try to incorporate ornamental stones [often used for engraving or sculpture], and of course, we have the Mellerio cut, a high-balanced cut mixing the oval, pear and cushion, with 57 facets. We have our own in-house workshop, where almost all our production is handmade. This is also what distinguishes us from other high-end jewelry brands: We offer a curated service, from our collections [and] bespoke creations, to repairing antique jewels. We are jewelers, and it's our business model.

What about your style?

I like color and size. I am particularly attached to the contrasts and effects

[created by combining] materials and cuts. When I create a collection, I play, and that's what guides me. Nothing scares me.... I like emeralds, and I tend to use them a lot. But to define more generally how I conceive collections, I draw jewels that I would like to wear.

What's your latest collection about?

The latest collection revolves around diamonds. It was a real stylistic exercise for me, with this desire to accentuate this stone that I usually work with to complement colorful gemstones. Jewels from this collection are really joyful. The lapis lazuli brings a lot to the creations, and the scarf necklace is truly a masterpiece. The next collection will be another artistic journey!

A Mellerio peacock aigrette sold in June during the Maharajas & Mughal Magnificence sale at Christie's. How do you feel about the antique jewels that come on the art market?

We were delighted to see this brooch during the various exhibitions and recently at this incredible sale in New York. This kind of event helps raise the popularity of the old Mellerio jewels. Besides, creations from our house are rare on the market. The peacock is the house's emblematic animal, the one that we create regularly. Long before Art Nouveau. So we were precursors. The first brooch was bought by a Spanish duchess in 1867, and I'm pretty sure it still exists. One day, it may resurface. mellerio.fr ■



Diamond and lapis lazuli Onda ring from the Isola dei Pescatori collection.

KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

The history of Mellerio dits Meller dates back to 1515, when a family of peddlers of small items left Craveggia, Italy, for France. In 1613, the French regent, Marie de Medici, allowed the family to trade within the French kingdom without paying taxes. This right was a major milestone and lasted until the end of Louis XVI's reign in 1792; Queen Marie Antoinette reportedly bought a Mellerio bracelet in 1780.

It was in 1815 that the family opened its shop on Rue de la Paix, and it continued to establish its reputation during the 19th and 20th centuries. Since 1955, the house has created the annual Ballon d'Or soccer award, and since 1981, the trophies of the French Open tennis tournament. In 2005, it debuted its proprietary Mellerio cut.

To celebrate the 400th anniversary of the privileges it received from the regent, the house presented the Medici collar necklace in 2013. The diamond and ruby piece took 4,500 hours to make.



Headquarters of Mellerio on Paris's Rue de la Paix since 1815.