

Ocean Colour Scene

02 November 2023

Drawing on codes from decades past, this year's most collectible new jewels are all sparkling odes to the deep and destined to make waves, says Kim Parker.

By Kim Parker

Kim Parker is a writer, journalist and Executive Fashion and Jewellery Director at Harpers Bazaar.

As in other visual arts, the sea has been a source of artistic inspiration to jewellers for centuries. From its tidal rhythms and its mysterious depths (replete with fascinating creatures) to its richly poetic and metaphoric powers, the oceanic world has held designers in its thrall ever since fragments of shell and coral were first fashioned into early adornments.

Jean Schlumberger, the iconic French designer who joined Tiffany & Co in 1956 and blazed a trail during his decades-long career at the house, felt such an affinity for the sea (a keen traveller, he had a holiday home in Guadeloupe where he studied local underwater life) that it informed some of his most memorable jewels, including starfish, urchins and anemones set with colourful enamel and gemstones. Even aquatic dangers presented him with creative opportunities. One ingenious brooch, his Jellyfish from 1967, was conceived after a high-profile client, the philanthropist Bunny Mellon, was stung whilst swimming in Antigua.

"In Jean Schlumberger's imagination and design philosophy, the sea represented an unknown, infinite world. He choreographed unparalleled manifestations of its majesty and mystery," says Nathalie Verdeille, Tiffany's current Chief Artistic Officer of Jewellery and High Jewellery. Launched this summer, her first Blue Book collection for the house "is a deep dive" into the sinuous marine forms that so appealed to the designer and reimagines many of his favourite motifs for contemporary collectors. His iconic jellyfish has been transformed into a pair of voluptuous sapphire, tanzanite, and moonstone earrings, whilst his familiar bristling anemone has given rise to a new necklace and ring with neon blue cuprian elbaite tourmalines and white diamonds set with their cuets facing outwards, to emphasise their spiny texture.

The new Praise To the Sea collection by Japanese pearl experts Mikimoto is also a bejewelled paean to the myriad creatures that populate the deep. For one abstract collar, undulating waves of white cultured pearls have been interspersed with pastel-coloured beryls, tourmalines, sapphires and garnets to recreate the swirling motion of a shoal of fish, with mesmeric results. Other more figurative pieces take their cue from sea creatures themselves, with graceful humpback whales hunting tiny tourmaline and garnet fish across a collar necklace, a sparkling sea horse taking refuge amongst a branch of diamond-encrusted coral on a long pendant, and even a quizzical-looking threadfin butterfly fish, whose graphic white and yellow patterning is echoed with rows of round yellow and white diamonds on a sparkling pin.



[Mikimoto](#) "Praise to the Sea" Collection.
Image courtesy of Mikimoto.

At fellow Japanese jeweller Tasaki, the sea isn't just an eternal source of inspiration, it is the lifeblood that houses and nourishes the oysters that produce the maison's lustrous Akoya pearls, for which it is renowned. This year, the maison pays tribute with its concise 'Atelier 6: Nature Spectacle' collection, with pieces that express aquatic phenomena such as eddying tidal movements, mirage-like reflections and pounding cascades in pearls and rainbow-hued stones. The spectacular Ocean Light necklace, for example, interprets the glistening effect of moonlight on white-capped nocturnal swells as ropes of differently sized Akoya pearls suspended from a collar set with inky South Sea pearls, blue zircons and yellow tourmalines.

There are fabulous waves, too, at the storied Place Vendôme jeweller Boucheron, where its innovative creative director, Claire Choïne, has conjured a whimsical take on Hokusai's iconic woodblock print, 'The Great Wave off Kanagawa', for her latest Carte Blanche high jewellery line. Inspired by the iron-on patches which adorned denim jackets in her youth, Choïne's novel wave brooch is formed from white gold and aluminium and outlined in dark blue lacquer, lending it a quirky, two-dimensional quality, while snow-set round diamonds add a feeling of movement to the wave's frothing crest.



[Mediterranean Muse Necklace](#) by Bulgari
Image courtesy of Bulgari.

The balmy shores of the Mediterranean were the impetus for Bulgari's creative director Lucia Silvestri, whose latest designs are a precious nod to the area traversed by the maison's own 'modern Aeneas', founder Sotirio Bulgari, who left his Greek homeland and settled in Rome, where he founded his jewellery house in 1884. "For me, being in the Mediterranean region is an awakening of all the senses," she says. One of the highlights, the Mediterranean Muse necklace, is an artistic interpretation of the sea itself, and took Bulgari's master craftspeople 1,600 hours to make. It's torchon-style body is constructed from rhythmic ripples of platinum and white diamonds, occasionally punctuated with curls of buff-top sapphires. In its centre, an impressive cushion-cut royal blue sapphire weighing 15.13 carats recalls the colour of the water itself, whilst nine diamond fringes, embellished with further polished sapphire beads and contrasted with light blue pear-cut aquamarine drops, glitter like sunlight on a salty spray. At once beautiful and dramatic, seductive and also astounding, it's a work of art that encapsulates the qualities of the sea that have kept us all captivated for quite so long.