



RAW TALENT

Trends trackers forecast the 2009-2010 fall-winter season as extremely optimistic, brimming with respect for nature and the environment, and also, an inclination to strong self-expression. Our desires to go back to the source of things, a return to natural elements is encouraged by our fast-paced, techno-savvy lifestyles that have us more connected to digital devices than the people and places around us.

*Drusy quartz necklace
courtesy of
Kara Ross.*

By Deborah Yonick

Watch for jewelry styles that incorporate a more organic, rough-hewn approach in raw gems and rustic finishes to be especially popular through 2010. Earthy yet elegant, designs flaunting uncut crystals, often set in textured metals from gold and brass to platinum and silver, reflect a handcrafted, one-of-a-kind feel. Roughing it is the way to go in an economic environ-

ment motivating consumers to be less ostentatious, and more introspective of what is meaningful and unique.

Designers are finding that the raw movement hits on several key selling points important to today's jewelry consumers, including both the green and crystal healing movements.

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Rough aqua bracelet courtesy of Petra Class.



Diamond stacking rings courtesy of Petra Class.

Gems in the buff typically lack enhancement and often show their birthmarks in a way that exults rather than hides or alters them. Moreover, gem crystals historically have been revered for their mystical powers. The natural aspect of raw gems gives the wearer a feeling of being closer-to-the-earth—a less processed aesthetic that’s more in line with an eco-friendly lifestyle.

According to Trendwatching.com, “the future has never looked greener,” as it becomes more of a necessity than an option to live and work with an eye on the



Turquoise stone chunky necklace courtesy of Pippa Small.

environment. This Amsterdam, Netherlands consumer trends firm says it is likely that brands without some eco-focus will find themselves left out in the cold when the global economy picks up.

In its annual Gem Visions trends forecasting report, Swarovski identifies nature and a concern for the environment as the backdrop for four leading design directions in 2010. The Austrian crystal and precision cut gem manufacturer—which has maintained a leading role as a trendsetting supplier to fashion and accessories designers worldwide—hails a new creative dynamism emerging from the current economic and social chaos.

Gem Visions 2010 references the use of raw gems as a key trend, specifically detailed in its “Divine Chimeras” direction, which embraces a new, magical, mystical movement to the age-old spirituality that is the soul of the jewel.

“Minerals are rough and rugged, painted metals look magical, all surfaces are transformed beyond recognition,” describes Nancy Leach, senior consultant gem creative for Swarovski. “Steely minerals like marcasite or hematite exude a futuristic gleam, while other metals are given an age-old patina or oxidization.”

In addition to the eco-push and tendency away from mass to singular expression, Leach also cites the availability of good quality gems for faceting as instrumental in the raw gem movement. She notes that out of necessity the industry is becoming more creative in its use of available material for jewelry design.

Rough Riders

But there is no denying that the fingerprint-like quality rough gems are exciting in that no two gems are ever the same, describes Dara Dubinet, a Venice, California-based artist. She also believes that natural gems have absorbed the earth’s raw healing energies that she strives to awaken in her jewelry to beautify the body.

Dubinet fell in love with earth’s natural stones and crystals during her time as a Feng Shui consultant, when she began to sense that they improved the lives of her clients. “Nature has already spent over four billion years creating the most beautiful of treasures,” she says. “My job is



Raw rock crystal ring courtesy of Kara Ross.



Raw emerald necklace and earrings courtesy of Kara Ross.



Raw aqua hemimorphite necklace courtesy of Kara Ross.

simply to embrace these natural, healing stones with precious metals, creating unique, one-of-a-kind wearable talismans." Her goal? To make her clients feel hopeful, optimistic and empowered when they wear her designs, which showcase a range of rough gems including spinel, apatite, sugilite, and hemimorphite.

Like Dubinet, Melissa Joy Manning of Oakland, California, another designer who exults natural gems in her work, also relies on Mother Nature for inspiration. "Jewelry can influence the way you feel; it can say and mean something different to every wearer," she tells.



Raw aqua cuff bracelet courtesy of Dara Dubinet.



Diamond with rough red spinel ring courtesy of Dara Dubinet.

Mixing a variety of metals, gems, and found objects, Manning pushes people's perceptions of what is precious. Among her favorite raw gems are spessartite, ocean jasper, banded agate, cactus quartz, azurite, and ammonite. Her latest collection, launched at the Couture Show in Las Vegas, showcases a variety of drusy gems like quartz, agate, garnet, and calcite in designs that emulate flower corsages. For Manning, uncut gems offer unusual texture, which is most appealing to her design sensibility. She believes her use of uncut gems has given her a competitive advantage because no two are alike.

Yet another designer who likes to play with rough is Pippa Small. This London-based artist/anthropologist—who divides her time between creating her own jewelry and working on craft initiatives with indigenous communities to help them generate self-sufficiency and income—enjoys designing around raw gems like rough ruby, aquamarine, hematite, and pyrite.

So does N.Y. accessories designer Kara Ross, who has been exploring her rough side in a new jewelry collection that incorporates raw emerald, kunzite, aquamarine, amethyst, citrine, and tourmaline in bold rings, pendants and necklaces. Ross says she enjoys showcasing the natural inclusions and rutiles in gems, which she believes add to the beauty and character of a piece.

A pioneer in the rough gem movement, Todd Reed of Boulder, Colorado, has seen interest in the use of raw gems in fine jewelry design grow tremendously since he started working with rough diamonds 15 years ago. In



Above: Azure-malachite necklace courtesy of Melissa Joy Manning.

Right: Necklace courtesy of Melissa Joy Manning



Raw diamond ring courtesy of Todd Reed.



Right: Raw diamond hoop earrings courtesy of Todd Reed.

just the past five years, he says, he has seen his business grow by 500%.

"I've always felt this was a great alternative to the traditional diamond industry and something women of style and discernment could easily relate to," describes Reed, who notes that men, too, especially appreciate the raw beauty of natural, uncut diamonds. "When I started this, the rough crystals were regarded as a material with no value, but since we treat them as precious art the consumer has responded in kind."

Many designers also enjoy mixing rough and faceted stones in their designs, like the San Francisco-based artist Petra Class, whose trademarks include the rhythmical arrangements of different elements and the unexpected contrasts of diverse textured materials like polished gems paired with rugged rocks. "My approach is highly refined yet not afraid to leave rough edges," she describes.

"I am endlessly fascinated with gemstones, precious or not," she continues. "Through my choice of colors and textures, I try to communicate a certain mood, an attitude towards life that will be sensed by whoever is looking at the piece, like an improvisational jazz melody or an abstract landscape."

Certainly, these creative jewelry designers not only appreciate raw gems for their color and texture, as well as

their natural aesthetic and eco-friendliness, but also for their personal significance. "Stones hold an inherent value not only in monetary worth but in meaning," describes Manning, who like Dubinet appreciates the healing powers of stones. "Whether or not you subscribe to that way of thinking, we believe we all could use a little more magic in our lives."

Trendwatching.com describes the future of luxury and what will define it in the years to come as comprising much more than ostentatiously flaunting wealth. Founder Reinier Evers sees luxury as emerging with our earth-bound connections on whatever level that may be. "Think discreet-chic," he says, "where symbolisms, stories, and secrets define what is luxurious to each of us."

As we seek to be more grounded, the desire to become one with nature is sure to influence design choices that reflect our relationship to Mother Earth. Jewelry expressing these connections will allow consumers to incorporate nature-inspired themes in a more meaningful way, from both a value standpoint to one teeming in emotion and personal style. ♦