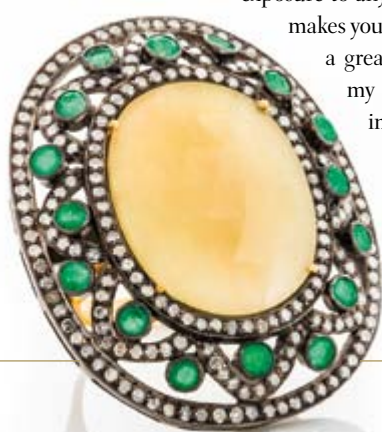


TREASURE TROVE

By Cassidy Hazelbaker

Roberta Calarese's Kanzi Jewels merge her Italian origins with the Emirati heritage of her husband thus transforming cultural differences into startling jewelry creations.

Cassidy Hazelbaker meets Calarese to learn the secrets.



Confident and poised, Roberta Calarese wears a chic black abaya as she greets me at Harvey Nichols, Dubai. The Italian-born founder of Kanzi Jewels has much to be proud of- her brand first launched on 4 September showcasing three different collections. The designer seems to fit in effortlessly with both the local Emirati culture, into which she is married, as well as her traditional Italian heritage, transitioning from one to the other and blending them together to create a persona every bit as elegant, unique and dynamic as her new jewelry line.

Born into a traditional and conservative Italian family, she spent the first 19 years of her life in one of the most beautiful and artistically rich countries of the world before moving to London, where she joined the fast-paced and male-dominated world of investment banking. Her career brought her to Dubai in 2000, which was a pivotal time for Dubai's financial sector. "I have had opportunities to work with top people from around the world," she says. "I was in the right place at the right time."

Calarese has proven to be a superstar in the financial scene; she is currently the Chief Legal Officer of the DIFC Authority, the DIFC Data Protection Commissioner and the Secretary of the Board of Directors. Contrary to what some people may assume about a woman working in finance in the Middle East, Calarese elaborates, "I feel very appreciated here. Women here have incredible opportunities, if [they] are capable and have the right support." Of her own experience, she states, "exposure to any culture enriches you; makes you a better person. I have a great capacity to adapt to my surroundings. It's important to respect the culture you're in. As they say, when in Rome...!"

The idea for Kanzi came along after discussions with her cousin, Chantal Sassoli de Bianchi, who moved to Dubai a few years ago. Seeking a creative outlet from the finance world, Calarese discussed the concept with Sassoli de Bianchi, who is now the Design Director. "We wanted to do something out of the box. We asked ourselves, what are the things that we love?" recalls Calarese. "We wanted our jewelry to be wearable, fashionable and statement-making, but also elegant. Elegance is key!" she declares emphatically.

The cousins aimed to not launch just another jewelry brand, but instead create pieces that could become means of expression for the wearer. "Emirati women are very unique. They are individualistic, creative and they love to express themselves boldly in color. They love to make a statement!" she observes. "We have designed Kanzi for these women. We want our jewelry to fulfill the different parts of a personality; we want our clients to express their moods through their jewels," explains Calarese. "Emirati taste in jewelry is still very traditional but it is evolving towards more trendy pieces."

Kanzi's three collections are distinctly different but all retain the elegance that is such an integral part of the brand. 'Vintage' is characterized by bold, geometric pieces in more neutral, earthy moonstones, emeralds, and geodes. 'Rose e Confetti' is, true to its name, full of über-feminine pink quartz and white agate set in pink gold. The settings and details are remarkably delicate; many of the rings have pink gold and diamond detailing that wrap around the stones, recalling a lovely garden in which vines twist around a garden trellis. 'Les Exclusives' is the most fantastical of the three collections, comprising whimsical shapes and a plethora of vibrant gemstones, including red ruby cabochon, orange spessartite, pink, blue



and green sapphires, blue tanzanite, mother of pearl, and pink opals. All three collections feature diamonds prominently through nearly all of their pieces, notably as sparkling little accents in the settings.

It is a wonder how Calarese juggles her roles as a mother, successful executive and now jewelry designer. "Kanzi is a hobby for me. I don't mind spending my free time doing it. The tradeoff though is time for myself, which is zero!" she laughs. The busy businesswoman is always on the go, whether dashing between meetings or traveling abroad to source gemstones. Her family is always close to heart and she combines her passions by incorporating her children into the creative process, taking their opinions on new designs. Even her husband has contributed, by proposing the brand's name. 'Kanzi' comes from Arabic and means 'my treasure.' Calarese found it an exotic and accurate description for the jewelry line. it is indeed a treasure. ♦

Kanzi Jewels are available exclusively at Harvey Nichols Dubai.



Facing Page Clockwise from Top Left: Earrings containing 18 carat white gold, diamonds with pink quartz roses. Ring containing 18 carat white gold, white diamonds with green calcite cabochon. Earrings in 18 carat gold, silver, gray and black diamonds. Ring containing 18 carat yellow gold, diamonds, sapphires and grey, pink and white pearls. Ring containing 18 carat rose gold, diamonds and blue topaz. Above: Kanzi founder Roberta Calarese. Below Left to Right: Ring in 18 carat gold, sapphire, emeralds and white diamonds. Earrings containing 18 carat white gold, diamonds with mother of pearl stars.