

Gem of an idea

From rainfall to the Royal Ballet, as Boodles Head of Design, Rebecca Hawkins finds inspiration for her work from a wealth of sources

WORDS CHARLOTTE MCMANUS

Having joined Boodles in 1990, Head of Design Rebecca Hawkins has been instrumental in bringing the heritage British jeweller into the 21st century.

With iconic designs that are instantly recognisable for their elegant curves, colourful stones and natural world motifs, her creations combine contemporary wearability with a timeless appeal.

How has Boodles changed in the three-plus decades you've worked at the company?

It's really grown. We've gone from making just engagement rings and commissioning jewellery to creating absolutely everything in house. We now have a team of four designers and do bespoke, collections, one-off pieces and fine gemstones.

Where do you look for design inspiration?

I'm attracted to naturalistic sources, such as patterns in nature. I've returned to water in a number of collections, such as Raindance, as it's always changing and there's scope to play with reflections. I also look at art and architecture, and even a word, a poem or the name of a painting can spark a new idea. I also visit exhibitions to keep filling up the inspiration pool, even if it's just discovering an interesting colour combination.

What are your favourite materials to work with?

At Boodles we use 18ct gold or platinum as the main structure, complete with diamonds and gemstones. You can really explore form with diamonds as they flow and follow any shape, particularly Ashoka-cut diamonds. Their low cut can bring a beautiful curve to an item of jewellery. I am also drawn to tsavorites, tanzanites and aquamarines.

Do current trends influence your designs or do you strive for a timeless approach?

My designs aren't connected to fashion because that changes too quickly, but they can be influenced by a deeper lifestyle trend. For example, the days of needing to convert a collar necklace to a tiara are gone, but there is still demand for something adaptable. That's a trend, but not one that changes the DNA of the style. If you're going to invest in a beautiful piece of jewellery, you want it to be something that you're still going to love in 10, 20 or 30 years' time.

Can you describe your creative process?

I start with research and sketching. It's important to start with a sense of what I want a collection to be – it's like following a thread through a maze. Later, I work on designs in more depth on my computer, refining and editing out ones that no longer fit. I begin at this stage to define the subtle nuances, how the design flows through into the clasp or the detail on the inside for example. Once I have the aesthetic established, I get the design team involved.

What might a typical day as Boodles' Head Designer involve?

Apart from design ideation, I work closely with the team to see how they're progressing with projects, or I might host client presentations. I'm involved with approving stones used for specific items, such as the rainbow colours in Raindance. I also have regular meetings with our chairman Nicholas Wainwright, who is very passionate about fine craftsmanship, and I visit the London atelier to see pieces being made. We use 3D-printing technology to look at prototypes from every angle. It's a fantastic asset in getting the final piece looking absolutely perfect.



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Some of the most memorable bespoke commissions you've worked on?

Each is special because you're turning someone's dream into a reality. Some clients have one piece made, then come back for others to build a collection. As part of Wonderland, we were asked to create a bespoke pair of cuffs that appeared to match, but in fact were slightly different, each telling its own story.

What has been your favourite Boodles project to work on to date?

The Pas de Deux collection, which involved me working with the Royal Ballet. Ballet is a different world, but it also shares many of the values of jewellery making – artistry, precision, detail and the highest level of execution. Translating movement, ballet and poise into jewellery was a new challenge.

Your proudest moment?

When the Raindance ring was selected to be part of the V&A's permanent collection in 2010. Having gone there since I was a child, I never thought in a million years that something I designed would be in the collection of such an iconic museum.

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Walled Garden sapphire and diamond-set bracelet



Ribbons Ashoka platinum bangle



Raindance white and Argyle pink diamond ring