

SOUL OF SANTO

LIKE THE DESIGNER HERSELF, ZANI GUGELMANN'S JEWELRY LINE IS MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

by Wendy Sy

It's pouring rain on a Wednesday evening in September and Zani Gugelmann is comfy at home in her Tribeca apartment. With whitewashed wood ceilings, Nantucket-style, it's her place of "zen" where she sketches each necklace, earring and ring design by hand before taking it to the jewelry district. It's there that the long process of production begins.

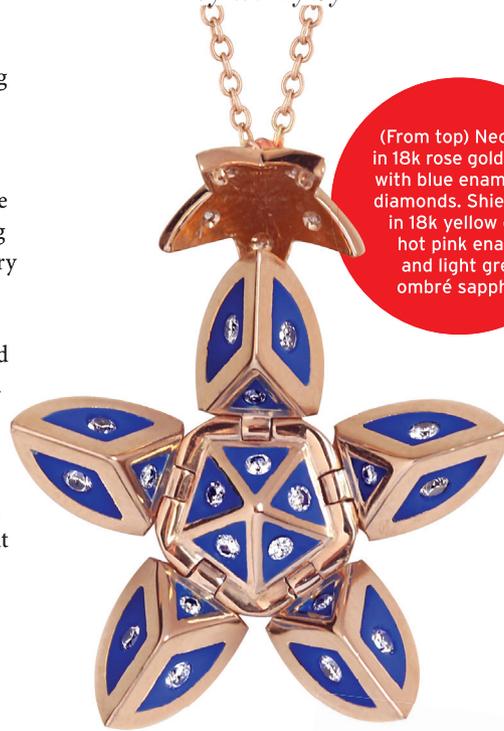
Her Santo line includes a collection called Alma, which translates to "soul" in Spanish. Among the pieces are seemingly simple orb pendants inspired by the Victorian era, each opening up to reveal an unexpected charm in the form of initials, hearts, crosses, stars or ladybugs. The idea behind it is to allow the wearer to hold something personal close to the heart. If you want to show it to somebody, you can, or you can keep it as a secret for yourself. "What I'm trying to get across is the emotion," says Gugelmann. "You see it and you feel it."

These days, orb pendants are few and far between. "I realized no one makes them because they are so difficult to produce," she says. "It's all mathematical and you have to be an insane perfectionist." But that was part of the appeal to the designer, who loves nothing more than a good challenge.

On the dining table are trays of her jewels, neatly placed side by side. Next to triangle-shaped foldable earrings and shield rings taking after styles from 16th-century Europe, she reaches for an orb pendant that opens up to a letter E with a turquoise enamel painted interior and 25 diamonds set on the outside. Behind the making of this design were countless rounds of trial and error before getting the

thickness of the wall just right. And the trickiest part is perfecting the hinges, which are a minuscule .6

Ladybug sphere with 18k yellow gold, blue enamel and diamonds.



(From top) Necklace in 18k rose gold petals with blue enamel and diamonds. Shield ring in 18k yellow gold, hot pink enamel and light green ombré sapphire.

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millimeters each. Every single detail matters, down to finding an honest caster who doesn't mix golds, which can cause visible air pockets on the design.

"The first orb took two years to finish," says Gugelmann. This particular piece unfolds to a reveal a cross with set diamonds and engravings spelling out the word 'invictus'. That was to give me the confidence to say, 'You know what? This is going to happen.'

As reflected in her designs, Gugelmann prefers understated luxury over flashy labels. "Growing up, my father always said, 'Do not

live beyond your means.' He doesn't show off—it's a Swiss thing." Her mother, who's of Peruvian descent, moved to the U.S. when she was 17.

Gugelmann was born in California, and along with her brother, the family moved to Switzerland for five years. Her father worked in finance and transferred his job to New York, so again they moved, this time to Greenwich, Connecticut. Gugelmann's education resume runs from Bowdoin College in Maine to studying under goldsmith Cecelia Bauer in New York, with some time off in Argentina in between.

"Zani was very interested in filigree in particular," says Bauer in her Midtown West studio. This type of jewelry metalwork involves microscopic wires that are twisted to form intricate motifs. "She loved learning and brought her enthusiasm to the class. It's always exciting for me to work with the camaraderie of people who are very dedicated to building skills to be able to create jewelry themselves."

Her first line, Filigrana, launched in 2002 and focused on delicate filigree earrings, which were handmade in Peru. She ran that business for four years before starting Santo in 2008, with silver bullet pendants. These carried the meaning of "a simple answer to a complicated problem." The concept was for wearers to unscrew the top of a bullet and place a handwritten goal inside. After a break, Santo was revived in late 2016 with the Alma collection, coming full circle to what it is today—a combination of detailed craftsmanship as fine as filigree and carrying a message as personal as the bullet pendants.

As Gugelmann closes a blue cross orb pendant around her neck, a snappy "click!" sounds. So satisfying. For jewelers, the noise of a lock is big deal, she notes. It's another factor that can take several rounds to get right. There's something to be said about the smallest of details that make a world of difference. ♦