

01.06.2025

Art Auro: Story, Born By Passion To Stones

We are used to seeing frequent advertisements of famous foreign brands like Chopard, Cartier, Bvlgari. It goes without saying that the products by these jewellery art “mastodons” are beyond all praise. But are our readers even aware of incredibly talented and sophisticated jewelers, born and working in Russia? Denis Miroshnik, CEO of Art Auro Russian jewellery company, spoke of these and many other things in his interview to the BM.Moscow Foresight magazine.

- How would you describe the current status of the Art Auro company, in a nutshell?

- Art Auro is not only about manufacturing jewellery. This is a genuine jewellery house with its own stores, a design atelier and production facilities. It embodies the Russian jewellery school, worthy of taking its place among the best global brands. We are steadily going towards this goal on the back of our unique top-quality products, speaking for themselves.

Every item under the Art Auro brand is underpinned by the philosophy of true Russian craftsmanship. We intentionally select only Russian top-notch gold and Yakutia diamonds of the legendary Russian Cut — the world-renowned standard, recognized for its flawless effects of light and mathematic accuracy of proportions.

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- Please tell us how did the Art Auro Russian premium jewellery brand get started? Is it true that your company got going as a “jewellery atelier”?

- The story of Art Auro goes way back to the late 1980s in the city of Obninsk, when we, teenagers at the time, had found our way to a local mineralogical club, headed by Mikhail Markovich Lysov. He told us a lot about geology, about stones, where and how they are mined. He had his own impressive mineral collections. We, being kids, were naturally enchanted by it. This was where, among glistening crystals and ancient fossils, our love for the jewellery craft was born and in time led us to becoming professional jewelers.

Mikhail Markovich taught us to work with ornamental stones: rhodonite, serpentinite, lazurite – it was very fascinating to cut stones with your own hands. Gradually we started making plain settings, rings. We could make earrings for our mothers. Overtime they began putting more trust in us and giving us some semi-precious stones to work on, and the best items were put up for sale. We were still going to school at the time.

Meanwhile, the country was choked by the total shortage of jewellery – these items were manufactured at factories only. The Soviet Union passed strict laws, forbidding private jewelers to work with precious metals at home. At the same time there were only a few genuine artisans. But those who took private orders illegally, sometimes created true works of jewellery art.

Then came more liberal times, and we, fresh out of school, continued to hone our skills and went to study at universities. Upon graduation, in the late 1990s, a group of Lysov’s former students decided to launch their own jewellery business. They named the company Art Auro.

In the early 2000s we really called ourselves an “atelier”. Keeping our heads above water was extremely hard – our parents could not afford any major funding and thus were unable to help us in any way, we lacked sponsors, banks were reluctant to lend to our microbusiness. But, against all odds, the Art Auro team had survived, got stronger and expanded its craftsman team – we performed a lot of bespoke orders from customers who wanted something striking and outstanding. As time went on, we were discovered by dealers, working with major Russian retail chains.

And in the fall of 2007 we opened the first Art Auro jewellery brand boutique in Obninsk. We had taken a lot of lumps, because we learned good manufacturing practices, but at the time our own retail was still Terra incognita for us. Step by step we got to realize that the store location that we had chosen was not good, we had to close down the old store and open a new one in the downtown of Obninsk. A few years later, in 2013, Art Auro opened its first brand boutique in Moscow.

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- If you don’t mind my asking, how many boutiques does the company have now?

- Let’s count them together: there are Art Auro boutiques in Obninsk, in Moscow’s GUM, “Kountsevo Plaza”, “Metropolis”, “Capitoly” malls, in the Vegas mall in Krasnogorsk. Just recently Art Auro has opened a storefront in the “Turandot” Gallery at Tverskaya Street.

We are keeping pace with the times: by actively developing online sales, we, I could say, are removing borders across Russia.

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- It’s nice to have a tool, which could help increase both sales and brand awareness. And who delivers jewellery items, pre-ordered online, to buyers?

- This is a separate area, and a very complicated one! Currently jewellery companies, including Art Auro, use services of logistics companies, licensed to operate with precious metals and stones, taking responsibility for careful delivery of high-value packages to our customers.

Our company is closely cooperating with SDEK company, our long-standing partner. This is a major logistics platform, combining multiple transport companies, taking care of all issues, related to delivery of packages and cargo across Russia.

- Your production facilities are located in the city of Obninsk, Kaluga Region?

- Yes, correct, our factory is still operating there.

- Your products are well-known in Russia. Does Art Auro have any plans to expand to foreign markets?

- Present-day challenges, including the anti-Russian sanctions, make exit to the global markets much harder. But we are positive: someday jewellery collections by Art Auro will win over the hearts of foreign customers. At the same time, I could confidently say that for over 25 years Art Auro has been winning trust not only of Russian customers, but of leading global jewellery houses as well. Many years (since 2005) of our cooperation with such legendary brands as Bvlgari, DeBeers, Dior and Chaumet in pre- and post-production servicing of their products go beyond just experience, this is genuine proof of international recognition of our skill.

I would admit, the habit of our people to fly out to the Emirates to shop for some brand items is persistent, because one could spend a vacation there and buy some fashion items, including gold jewellery. On the other hand, a generation of fantastically talented jewelers has arisen in Russia, and they are in no way inferior, and often even superior to foreign craftsmen.

- Suffice to say that the Russian public is familiar with Ilgiz Fazulzyanov’s works – they call him the most recognizable jeweler of Russia.

- I could name a dozen excellent jewellery craftsmen, working in Russia. And Ilgiz is totally unmatched in his skill by any foreign craftsmen. His precious art intertwines modern and national traditions, West and East, pomp and subtle taste.

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A jewellery piece, in my mind, is a reflection of a country, its heritage, because jewellery art brings together all discoveries, all technologies existing at a certain point in time. These include metallurgy, physics, chemistry and mathematics and design. Anything in existence with the mankind is combined by jewellery art.

Jewelers are working hard, improvising, designing something special every year. Catalogs of renowned companies feature watches of original designs, with precious stones, unique movements. And such masterpieces are made not only abroad, our artisans are keeping pace with them. I am referring to Konstantin Chaikin, a famous Russian watchmaker, who keeps on surprising us with his imagination and skill every year.

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- Russia is rich in other unique jewellery artisans as well. Why are their houses not as widely known?

- It seems to me that the issue is that the promotion of products, made in Russia, including jewellery items, is still in its infancy, unlike the situation in the West. We have yet to learn to be proud of all things “Made in Russia”! This is why some Russians still feel that owning jewellery by, let’s say, much “hyped” French Cartier, is more prestigious than items by Art Auro, but we are working on it!

- There are online reports that Art Auro has tried to cooperate with its Spanish namesake brand – a watch-making company, but something did not come off …

- It was quite otherwise! We have not had any contacts whatsoever, and the same corporate name is just a curious coincidence. The thing is that when we were registering our trademark, we had been surprised to find out a Madrid-based double - the Artauro company, manufacturing timepieces with corrida symbols. And even though Art Auro craftsmen also designed a few exclusive gold watches with exquisite grand feu enameled watch faces, we have never had any contacts.

By the way, let me tell you, it was quite hard, because classic jewellery making technologies are drastically different from building such complex engineering systems as watch cases – you need to comply with a lot of requirements, applicable to timepieces: these are water resistance, hole alignment, selection of glass, hands - it is a colossal job. All of these required very high skill from our craftsmen. I’ll admit, the company has spent more than it made from it. For this very reason we rarely make timepieces now, and never in partnership with the Spanish Artauro.

- Has it been any easier for your company to operate after the exit of major foreign brands from Russia?

- In terms of economics, I would say there is indeed a positive effect. It would be, of course, very hard to quantify, because a whole lot of events has happened over the latest six years (since the start of the COVID pandemic).

Due to the closed borders between countries, people travel less, as a result of this, Russians are spending more money within Russia. Moreover, due to the sanctions the mix of companies, represented on the RF market, has changed. They were immediately replaced by domestic businesses.

Our company has also not rested on its laurels. We invested more money into manufacturing, into search for and training of craftsmen, into advertisement, we opened stores. As I see it, the upside of the current situation is that all of this has had an

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impact on the development of the jewellery business in Russia. Domestic brands have literally blossomed right in front of our eyes.

Undoubtedly, the development of the Russian market has been impacted by the rising level of patriotism – people are now proud to praise domestic manufacturers and are buying products labeled “Made in Russia”.

At the same time there are quite a few Russian companies, including jewellery ones, which have failed to perform under new market conditions. Maybe, it could be blamed on some marketing miscalculations.

- Does Art Auro prefer bespoke items, into which jewelers put their hearts and souls, or off-the-shelf ones?

- All jewellery items reflect the soul of an artisan! As a professional, I could tell you that the so-called “plain” items, featured in our standard collections, have taken as much time, craftsmanship and money to make, and often even more, than sophisticated and “exuberant” jewellery. The reason for this is pretty straightforward: to release a jewellery item as a part of a collection, it needs to be replicated dozens of times; making a regular model, easy to manufacture, requires purchasing expensive equipment etc. Mass production of jewellery items needs to be based on comprehensive analysis, testing, engagement of dozens of experts and investment of a lot of money into advertisement, for these models to “catch the eye” of consumers.

Naturally, we are making exclusive items too. I would never take the merit away from our artisans, making one-of-a-kind items never to be replicated again. Nevertheless, believe me, it would be much easier to sprinkle an item with diamonds and put a shiny stone in the center, than to think through a process to manufacture a series of 10-15 much simpler items.

- How are designer jewellers trained in Russia today?

- Let me share my personal view. Our art universities educate many capable young people. But the thing is that they, even having basic knowledge of jewellery art, will be of practical use to their company only after several months of hard and meticulous labor at best.

- What do you see as an advantage of the Art Auro company over other Russian brands?

- We love our customers very much, we always try to provide the maximum level of service, we have been studying this for such a long time! Over the course of our evolution we have been faster than others for a split second, we have performed

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better at some point, sometimes we came up with more sophisticated and attractive designs, sometimes we were faster to pick up the phone … And now all of the above make up the key advantage of the Art Auro jewellery house!

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