



All that glistens

With a laid-back-meets-luxe approach, jewellery designer Valérie Messika embodies the spirit of her eponymous brand: elegant with a subtle edge. Grace Cain picks up some style tips

Photographer VICTORIA ADAMSON / Fashion Editor CHRISTOPHE RUIZ

I was born with diamonds,” says Valérie Messika, with a coy smile, referring to spending a considerable portion of her youth playing with the gems, in the same way that other pre-iPad children might have played with marbles. Messika’s father, André, was a renowned diamond merchant, and would often bring his wares home to show his daughter. “I remember placing them on my fingers, and feeling there was something magical in the contact between the diamonds and my skin,” she explains.

It obviously made a lasting impression. Today, 14 years on from launching the maison that bears her name, Messika designs jewellery that is instantly recognisable for the way the diamonds seem to hover against the wrist or around the neck. Having grown up in an environment where diamonds were demystified, she now operates on the philosophy that they can be worn by anyone, for any occasion. “You used to have to wait for someone to propose before you could have a diamond ring. Now, you can buy your own.” She shrugs. “They’re no longer sacrosanct, and that’s because more people are creating fashionable jewellery that can be worn every day.” Messika explains that she increasingly finds herself designing for people like her, who buy jewellery because it’s an integral part of their personal style; not something to be reserved for a gift or special occasion. “It’s just like fashion: you want to complete the look, or you have an idea of how you want to mix and match different pieces,” she says.

It will come as no surprise, then, that she often turns to

Valérie wears, jewellery
MESSIKA Lucky Move PM Pavé necklace £2,090; rings (from top) My Twin Toi & Moi £3,700 and Glam’Azone Double Pavé £5,300; bangles (from left) Move Romane with diamonds £7,790, Noa £5,390 and Noa with diamonds £9,570, all in 18kt white gold; earrings, see opposite page; *fashion* ISABEL MARANT jacket from a selection

the fashion industry to find her muses. A frequent Messika collaborator is Gigi Hadid, who the designer says “shares her vision of the jewellery of today”. “Fashion is a huge source of inspiration for me, so I asked myself: ‘From the industry, who embodies my values of wearing diamonds with sneakers and jeans?’ Very quickly, I had Gigi Hadid at the top of my list.”

While Hadid’s fresh approach is a great fit for the brand, Messika is clearly her own best muse. Today, she is wearing black jeans, and a small army of slim bangles and barely-there chains quietly jostle together on her wrists. Diamonds wink from every finger; she has stacked different pieces from several of her own collections, mixing metals and styles in a way that still tells a coherent story. Are mornings a whirlwind of bracelet-fastening and tricky ring-related decisions? “Oh, I don’t change my jewellery every day,” she says. “It’s usually every two or three months. Sometimes, it’s seasonal; I’ll wear rose gold throughout the summer, but in September, I’ll switch to white gold.”

When I ask if she has any tips for styling jewellery, she holds up her hands. “I would never impose my style on someone. If people ask me, I love to offer advice; but I think it’s cool when they mix and match my jewellery to suit their own personalities.”

Messika’s individual tastes are intertwined with her design aesthetic: subtle and sophisticated, with a twist of rebellion. “I think my style is quite casual, but chic,” she says. “For example, I’ll often wear a diamond bracelet with a leather cord.” Her tendency to combine the luxe with the casual extends well >



Valérie wears, jewellery,
from top MESSIKA My Twin mono earring £1,350, My Twin studs £1,990 and Gatsby XS hoop earrings £1,030; bangles (from left) Move Noa £5,390, Noa with diamonds £9,570 and Romane with diamonds £7,790, all in 18kt yellow gold; My Twin Trilogy ring £18,300; *fashion* LOUIS VUITTON jumpsuit with belt £3,550; NICHOLAS KIRKWOOD boots from a selection

HOW SHE WEARS

“Inspiration is like a muscle. The more you train your eyes, the more inspired you feel”

beyond her jewellery box. “I love the contrast of wearing jeans with stilettos. I think it’s super-feminine,” she explains. “I have a huge respect for Saint Laurent. It’s so elegant and timeless, but it can also be sharp and edgy.”

Saint Laurent ranks high on the list of Messika’s go-to brands, but it’s not her only favourite. The late Tunisian couturier Azzedine Alaïa is another object of admiration. “There is something very poetic and feminine about Alaïa,” she says. “The clothes look beautiful, whatever body type you have. Then you have brands like Max Mara and Emporio Armani...” She holds out her hands. “They are just so very chic.”

Chic is a word which crops up regularly in the Messika lexicon. Her style icon, Kate Moss, is “always chic. She is multifaceted and can transform herself into anything. She can be bohemian, or rock ‘n’ roll. Anything she wears looks modern, even if it’s vintage”. (A few weeks after this chat, Messika launched a campaign fronted by Moss, and, sure enough, dressed in a leather jacket, her hair artfully tousled, the supermodel proved a fitting representative for the nonchalant glamour of the Messika world.)

That sense of effortless sophistication is something that French women – if we’re resorting to fashion stereotypes – are often said to possess. “I’ve definitely noticed that Parisian style is about the ‘no make-up’ look,” says Messika. “It’s not that we don’t have make-up on, because we do. We just give the impression that we don’t.” She grins. “When I go abroad, I am always the person who is the least dressed up. But I really respect anyone who makes that effort.” Her face suddenly brightens in delight, and she waves a diamond-encrusted hand towards the doorway. “Like here! I have just seen a woman wearing a big hat!”

I know exactly which woman she is talking about. I had seen her too, as I walked through the lobby of The Connaught Hotel on my way to meet Messika. She was wearing a marshmallow-pink ensemble, topped with a matching wide-brimmed hat. “I find that so very chic!” says Messika in an incredulous tone.

Big pink hats may not play a starring role in Messika’s own wardrobe, but she does rely on some sartorial heroes of her own.

Valérie wears, jewellery, from top
MESSIKA My Twin studs £1,990,
Gatsby XS hoop earrings £1,030,
Lucky Eye pavé ring £1,040,
GlamAzone Double ring £3,260
and My Twin 2 Rows necklace
£4,650; fashion BALMAIN jacket
£1,625; THEORY T-shirt £235; ISABEL
MARANT trousers £1,945; NICHOLAS
KIRKWOOD shoes from a selection



VALÉRIE'S WARDROBE MUST-HAVES

Black stilettos

“Gianvito Rossi’s are super-comfortable.”

Well-cut white shirt

“To give your wardrobe a little lightness.”

Chic(!) versatile outerwear
“I love my Saint Laurent cape and Balenciaga Perfecto jacket.”

Comfortable travel outfit

“A sweater, leggings and sneakers.”

Black skinny jeans

“Worn with diamonds, of course!”

Luxury Jewellery and Womenswear, First Floor; Harrods Shoe Heaven, Fifth Floor; and harrods.com

Photographer’s Assistant
RORY JAMES

“I have an amazing Saint Laurent cape, which I can pair very easily with different looks,” she says. “If I am wearing jeans, I can wear the cape. If I am wearing a dress, I can wear the cape.” Other Messika-certified staples include a Balenciaga Perfecto jacket, black skinny jeans and a really sharp, high-quality white shirt. “White lifts your look, so I always think it’s a great colour to wear. As for the shoes, I think everyone should own a pair of black stilettos.” She lifts a leg to show me today’s pair; classic black pumps, with a low vamp and high spiked heel. “Saint Laurent, again. I love the way they are cut.”

Messika insists that her greatest source of inspiration – for fashion, and beyond – is everyday life. This could mean a piece of art in a museum, or a trend in a magazine; but it could also be a stranger walking down the street. “I love to observe different kinds of women; the way they behave, their style, their energy,” she says. “Inspiration is like a muscle. The more you train your eyes, the more you feel inspired by everything you see.” □