

IAN ST. GIELAR

Designer Extraordinaire

Diane Fitzgerald

I remember clearly the first time I saw Stanley Hagler jewelry at Cristobal, a small antique shop in Alfie's Market in London. To say the least, it was magnificent. Along the mirrored walls of the shop were necklaces and brooches sparkling with rhinestones and vividly colored beads. The pieces drew me in like a magnet for closer inspection. Many pieces resembled collages arrayed with sprays of flowers,

buds, leaves, butterflies, and dragonflies, all arranged with an eye for artistry and naturalism. Most were made with glass beads, including seed beads, pressed glass flower beads, and handmade lampwork leaves and flower petals. My kind of jewelry, no doubt! The pieces were all the creation of Ian St. Gielar, who has been the chief designer for Stanley Hagler NYC since 1990 and who now owns the company.

From humble beginnings in the small village of Sanok, Poland, St. Gielar came to the United States in the early 1980s and worked in the hotel industry. As a child, he had learned to sew and embroider from his mother, and these manual and artistic skills proved invaluable.

Coupled with his French, Italian, German, and Czech heritage, his skills enabled him to move quickly from basic jewelry assemblage to designing in his own unique and appealing style. He joined the Stanley Hager company in 1989.

Stanley Hagler began his career in the 1950s when

a friend challenged him to try designing jewelry. He responded that he could make a piece fit for a queen, and indeed he did; his first piece went to a duchess! However, Hagler's jewelry, with its pearls and gold, was only appropriate with a limited range of clothing—the high fashion conservative clothes worn by the very wealthy. His costume jewelry for the couture line was much in the style of Miriam Haskell and Robert DeMario; components such as beads, faux baroque pearls, and metal stampings were attached to a filigree plate with wire. (For more information on this type of jewelry, see *The Jewels of Miriam Haskell*, by Deanna Farneti Cera, published by the Antique Collectors Club, November 1997.)

From 1990 to 1996, St. Gielar was the company's only designer, and he has continued Hagler's techniques of collage and attaching elements to a filigree plate with wire. But he's departed from Hagler's style in his bold use of color, bringing new life to the line of costume jewelry and creating his own distinctive style. St. Gielar's updated approach recognizes that colorful jewelry has broad appeal and can be worn in the daytime, through all four seasons, and



even with casual clothes such as jeans. St. Gielar has also trained a new generation of designers like Marlena Stettner, Peppa, and Valentina.

St. Gielar's work often reminds me of a corsage in its graceful arrangement of elements. One of my favorite pieces is a necklace composed of several strands of amber fire-polished beads which support a collage of three lavender orchids made of resin. These are arranged naturally with several star flowers tucked in between. The star flower petals are embellished with hundreds of roses montée, and the centers are small glass flowers held in place with rhinestone head pins. (Roses montée are faceted glass stones attached to a metal plate with prongs. Two channels on the metal plate are arranged like a cross to allow secure attachment in two directions.) Between these larger elements St. Gielar places tiny leaves made by wrapping seed beads with wire around a metal leaf. This necklace is worn with the corsage off-center just below the shoulder so that it resembles the full luxuriousness of a Hawaiian lei. (I felt like a tropical queen as I wore it during the interview with St. Gielar!)

St. Gielar's brooches are **equally amazing**. They give one the impression of bouquets of flowers set in lovely vases. The vases on his brooches, originally designed to be pendants, are usually made of Czech pressed glass. The color palette of each brooch may be monochromatic, making a bold statement with a single color, or it may be varied, resembling many types of flowers. But always, like the necklaces, there is detail in the layering of components and juxtaposition of textures.

Another necklace style by St. Gielar consists of a choker length band made of double-needle right-angle



weave from which strands of beads cascade or burst forth like rays from the sun. One such necklace is made with green transparent beads accented with a salad of strawberries, oranges, and other fruit. Another, which appeared on the cover of *Shine* magazine in February 2000, is made entirely of clear beads with a rainbow finish, so that the necklace shimmers like a collar of icicles.

Although the colors in many of his pieces are often bold and lively, St. Gielar also uses texture to add dimension to a piece. The smooth petals of a glass flower contrast well with the texture of a leaf created of seed beads wrapped around a metal stamping. Occasionally flower petals are wrapped with beads on wire and combined with colored Swarovski rhinestone wheels or head pins. These give his pieces a tactile quality not found in much of today's costume jewelry and set his work apart from other artisan-produced pieces.

St. Gielar begins designing a collage brooch by selecting a centerpiece or focal point. This can be a group of several petal-shaped glass beads formed into a flower, a dragonfly, a resin orchid, or a carved ivory

piece. Then he selects the secondary elements such as more flowers, buds and leaves, and centers for the flowers. These are attached with fine wire to a filigree plate. A second filigree plate is placed over the back of the first to cover the wires and to serve as a base for the pin back. Components for St. Gielar's work may be new or vintage glass, or occasionally, unusual pieces obtained on travels through Europe and from an old stock of parts from the Stanley Hagler days. St. Gielar also uses natural stones, coral, bone, carved ivory, and mother-of-pearl.



PHOTOS BY DIANE FITZGERALD

Collectors are one of his target markets. Carol Kelly, a 1950s and 1960s jewelry collector who is specializing in St. Gielar's work, finds him to be the most exciting of today's jewelry designers and the only contemporary artist whom she collects, partly for his use of glass components. Kelly, who has more than fifty of his pieces, says she has learned much about his work and gained an appreciation for its intricacy and detail by carefully observing its construction. Kelly plans to donate a piece to the Corning Museum of Glass to represent recent work incorporating Czech and German glass beads and ornaments by an American designer.

While St. Gielar may turn to books for inspiration, he says, "You then need to experiment with your own ideas, otherwise you are just copying someone else's work." St. Gielar prefers to make one-of-a-kind pieces because he says, "It frees my thinking. If I am worrying about making ten pieces just alike, or even considering larger production, I begin to worry about the cost of components and the time required to make each piece. Maybe then I would use fewer roses montée or rhinestone head pins, or I wouldn't layer the flowers or add as many leaves." For this reason, his work is fully developed and complete, offering the sense of a garden in full bloom, with no skimming on parts.



St. Gielar's dream is to receive an Oscar for fashion someday and he's on his way to achieving that goal: One of his pieces appeared in "Bullworth," the 1999 movie starring Warren Beatty about a politician who tries honesty to get elected. St. Gielar also designed earrings for Whoopee Goldberg to wear to the 1992 Oscar awards.

Each piece St. Gielar now sells is accompanied by a certificate signed by him and bearing his oval metal tag in addition to the Stanley Hagler NYC tag. In this way, St. Gielar hopes to establish and eventually sell his work under only his own name. Right now he sells his work through a limited number of galleries and on eBay (search for Stanley Hagler).

For me, seeing St. Gielar's creations was like finding water in a desert, and I took a nice long drink. ©

Diane Fitzgerald is a bead artist who writes frequently about beadwork and beadery to share some of what she sees and learns in her travels. Contact Diane through her website www.diane-fitzgerald.com. Ian St. Gielar may be contacted via e-mail at IanStGielar@aol.com.

