

ALL HANDS ON DECO

A pioneering Paris gallery is rebooting the 1920s aesthetic via an LA jeweller. By *Gilles Khoury*

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Left: hammered sterling silver, moonstone and onyx Rising Moon flask and (above) brushed sterling silver, blackened sterling silver, bronze, rock crystal and glass Sun, Sperm, Tear magnifying glass, both by Sophie Buhai. All pieces throughout, POA

point than she has offered in the past (from \$3,000 to \$15,000). “This project was all about challenging both myself and the artisans I work with, pushing the boundaries of scale in my pieces, introducing new materials and reviving old intricate techniques such as Japanese urushi lacquer,” Buhai explains. “Whether you’re designing a lamp or a necklace, it’s a matter of switching mediums while keeping the intention of creating meaningful objects the same.”

Collection highlights include a minaudière and a bud vase crafted using the black urushi lacquer technique, accented with stones sourced from the Tucson Gem, Mineral & Fossil Showcase in Arizona; a magnifying glass where brushed sterling silver, bronze, rock crystal and lackened sterling silver converge in a surrealist nod to Dalí; a sterling-silver pillbox adorned with carnelian; a toothpick case; and a curved letter opener. The pieces are whimsical yet showcase impeccable craftsmanship – they are objects that are immediately tactile. “We talked about how, in today’s world, we’ve lost the intimate relationship with our daily objects,” says Blum. Buhai hands me the signature Donut ring she is wearing, demonstrating how the precise weight of a piece is essential to the tactile experience of wearing it.

Buhai and Blum first met in 2022 and hit it off immediately. They share a similar personal history and a passion for the decorative arts – particularly the art deco movement, which is enjoying a revival in its centennial year. Buhai, who’s known about the gallery ever since she started coming to Paris to show her collections, describes Galerie Anne-Sophie Duval as a “mandatory stop” in the city, almost like going to a museum.

“I walked in and there was this stunning exhibition about lacquer,” recalls Buhai. “I introduced myself to Julie and she gave me a book on lacquered jewellery – that’s how our conversation started.” According to Blum, the two share “a sensitivity for function and craftsmanship that defines a piece, but also a shared taste for objects that are incredibly sophisticated – almost like jewellery – even when they stem from the ordinary. I felt that Sophie’s work perfectly embodied this idea of elevating everyday objects into something special.”

BLUM, WHO GREW UP ON PARIS’S LEFT BANK and lived in London between 1997 and 2008, comes from a line of female gallerists and antique dealers. In the early 1960s her grandmother Yvette Barran founded a gallery dedicated to art nouveau; 1972, the year Anne-Sophie Duval established her gallery, was pivotal for the antiques market: the fashion designer and collector Jacques Doucet put his collection of art deco furniture up for auction at Hôtel Drouot,

reopening of the gallery. Its renovation was entrusted to the revered French architect and designer Sylvain Dubuisson. “This revamp has been a comprehensive transformation, reorganising the gallery with larger rooms and partially restoring it to its original layout while also adding an extension to the existing space,” says Blum, a brunette with an undone Parisian elegance seated next to Buhai, who embodies old-world America.

The collection represents a significant milestone for Buhai, who closed her womenswear brand Vena Cava in 2013, then launched the eponymous jewellery label she now runs with CEO Josh Sussman, who is also her husband. She’s become renowned for her sterling-silver creations that exude a modernist-inspired poetry. This new body of work features 19 one-of-a-kind and limited-edition pieces at a higher price

It’s my favourite place to meet in Paris,” says the LA-based jewellery designer Sophie Buhai as she sinks into a striped velvet sofa in the bar of L’Hotel in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés district. A favourite of Elizabeth Taylor and Serge Gainsbourg, and famously where Oscar Wilde spent his final days, the hotel is steps from the legendary Galerie Anne-Sophie Duval, a staple in art deco and 20th-century decorative arts since its opening at 5 quai Malaquais in 1972.

On 6 March, Buhai will present a collection that sits at the intersection of jewellery and design as part of the *Jewellery Objects* exhibition at the gallery. The event, hosted by Julie Blum, who took over the gallery following her mother’s death in 2008, marks both the 10th anniversary of the launch of Buhai’s brand and the



Left: jewellery designer Sophie Buhai (right) and Anne-Sophie Duval director Julie Blum



Above: Buhai and Blum outside Galerie Anne-Sophie Duval in Paris. Left: sterling silver, black urushi lacquer, maple and carnelian Three Sisters Bud Vase by Sophie Buhai

sparkling enthusiasm for the avant-garde works of Pierre Legrain, Eileen Gray and, later, Jean-Michel Frank. That same year, Duval shook up the art market by inviting Karl Lagerfeld to design her booth at the Biennale des Antiquaires in Paris, where, for the first time, art deco was presented alongside classical art.

When Blum took over the gallery in 2008, the space had become an institution, known for celebrating designers such as Pierre Chareau, Alberto Giacometti and André Groult. Patrons include Marc Jacobs, Anthony Vaccarello, Pieter Mulier and Hedi Slimane. “I felt I had to continue what she had built,” says Blum, whose background is in law and architecture. “But that’s also when I realised I knew more than I thought. I think that’s thanks to the intuition passed down from my grandmother and mother – a sense of knowing when something is the right piece.”

Buhai’s aesthetic was informed by her upbringing in Los Angeles. “It’s very much an art deco city – different from Paris, of course – but heavily developed in the 1920s and ’30s, with a huge influence of early modernism. It’s always been part of my visual landscape.” From an early age, she was inspired by the women in her family. “They were all strong women, my mother, grandmother and her sisters, all wearing big sterling-silver jewellery. Not the typical diamonds or pearls, but bold, modernist pieces. When I started my brand in 2015, most women were wearing smaller pieces. It felt natural for me to explore sterling silver, not just because of my family, but because it’s what our artisans in Los Angeles do best.”

For the past decade, Buhai has carved out “this middle space between design and jewellery making”. While her hoop earrings and delicate jasper collar necklaces have a cult following among fashion editors, her expanding line of objects, from pocket mirrors to cigarette cases reminiscent of the Vienna Secession, is also gaining fans. The label is stocked by fashion outposts Dover Street Market and Net-A-Porter, as well as art institutions such

as the New York Museum of Arts and Design, and Trevor Cheney Gallery in Los Angeles.

The Paris show aligns Buhai’s work with the traditions of art deco. The objects will be displayed with furniture and antiques curated by Blum, such as red lacquer nesting tables by Katsu Hamanaka and a parchment-lacquer guéridon table by Marcel Coard. “What I find most

compelling about art deco is its freedom: the fluidity between genres and disciplines, chiefly the collaborations between artists, and the importance placed on materials and craft. It’s all about dialogue and exchange,” says Blum.

The women hope, as Blum puts it, that the show will offer a fresh point of view on the period, “inviting the younger generations of artists and designers to engage with it and see what they take from it”. In essence, *Jewellery Objects* is set to encapsulate the renewed spirit of art deco while giving a flavour of the next 100 years. ■HTSI