

Jewelry

A Cut Above

Venice awaits a revival

The pandemic's empty streets may have made the city more livable, but they left its jewelers without buyers and struggling for survival

BY MELANIE ABRAMS

Venice has endured war, plague and conquest in its 1,200 years as Queen of the Adriatic, but after the last two years, many of its jewelers are struggling to stay open.

On Nov. 12, 2019, more than 85 percent of the 120 islands that make up the city were inundated with as much as six feet of water, a result of high tides and a storm surge driven by strong winds.

Leslie Ann Genninger, a glass jewelry artisan whose studio is in the Dorsoduro neighborhood, said her display tables were submerged. "The glass was broken so I had to redo about 80 or 90 percent of the pieces," which took eight months, she said. Water was knee-deep in St. Mark's Square, forcing the Nardi jewelry shop there to close for two months.

On March 9, 2020, the city's first coronavirus lockdown was ordered. Since then the Veneto region, of which Venice is the capital, has been Italy's second hardest hit region in the pandemic (following Lombardy), with more than 439,800 cases reported as of early this month.

The two disasters turned Venice from a crowded tourist hub into a city where its approximately 258,000 residents were almost alone. "It was a beautiful, empty, surrealistic Venice," Ms. Genninger said.

And deserted streets don't buy necklaces.

Now that tourists have been returning, despite the spread of the Delta variant, the jewelers are trying to recover.



Alberto Nardi, 54, whose shop front spans five arches of the gallery edging St. Mark's Square, would not detail his revenues but said the business lost 30 percent of its sales year over year. He has reduced the store's opening days and hours, to cut costs, and has introduced customer appointments.

"We have to show to clientele that we are different, and that's the only possi-

bility that we have to survive" against the big-budget megabrands, said Mr. Nardi, who plans to introduce two collections during the Venice Film Festival in September.

And if the almost 100-year-old Nardi brand is concerned, imagine the difficulties of lesser-known businesses. "Jewelers in Venice aren't that big anymore in the market today," Leo Criaco, jewelry

specialist at Christie's in Geneva, wrote in an email. He cited as an exception Nardi, which is famous for its Moretti pieces. (Also known as Blackamoor, the designs feature the head of a man in ebony or onyx or painted black and have come under some criticism lately.) He also cited the Venetian artisan Attilio Codognato.

But, he added, "we rarely have big

pieces (if any) from them."

Tom Burstein, a Connecticut-based jewelry sales and acquisitions specialist, agreed, comparing Venice's jewelers with brands in world capitals. "If you think of Paris, you immediately think of Cartier and Van Cleef & Arpels," he said. "If you think of London, you think of Graff and Asprey. In the U.S., Tiffany and Harry Winston. Bulgari, Rome," he

said. "And then in Venice you really think of two primary jewelers, Nardi and Codognato."

But, he added, "in such a small concentrated area, it would be difficult to get more than two or three global brands out of that area," he said.

Also, "there's no really mass defining style that has come from Venetian jewelry," he said.

New wave

Cosima Montavoci specializes in glass jewelry with her company, Sunset Yogurt, named for the consistency and color of white-hot glass. Left, a pair of the brand's earrings.



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