

Stone Architects

Driven by a desire for self-expression, MICHELLE ONG, WALLACE CHAN and CINDY CHAO have redefined the boundaries of jewellery design with their sculptural works of art that exude refinement, expert technique, and a tasteful balance of Eastern and Western influences

TEXT EMILIE YABUT-RAZON, PENNY ZHOU AND ROSHNI MULCHANDANI



ADDED SPARKLE

Floating Diamonds necklace in platinum; Majestic Jade Earrings with diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, garnet and amethyst—both Carnet by Michelle Ong

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MICHELLE ONG

From London to Hong Kong, Michelle Ong's exacting level of craftsmanship is well known to her patrons. The founder of Carnet jewellery has a love of rose-cut gems and lacework, European influences that she combines with oriental patterns, such as clouds and dragons. She plays with a technique through which stones are set as if they are floating, to make them seem "lighter than light." This fusion of East and West results in a style that is distinctly Ong's.

Among her favourite things to create for Carnet are floral pieces. "There is a natural romance inherent in flowers," she says. "I think every woman has a flower with special significance, and I love to play with the presentation by enhancing the form and femininity of the piece with gemstones."

Ong recently designed two floral brooches with diamond rondelles. "They are a pair, complementary but never matching," she says. "That is the key (to jewellery): eye-catching, important and with a modern twist."



The jeweller, whose diamond pieces have received praise for their ethereal quality, says she is especially attracted to the light-diffusing properties of rose-cut diamonds. "To me, they have a mesmerising brilliance, like light pouring through the clearest of water."

Ong also works with coloured material such as jade. "I always combine young and chic designs with pieces of old jade that are a translucent, light, gorgeous green," she says.

Ong was drawn into creating jewellery when she couldn't find pieces she liked from other designers. Her affinity for art and gems led her to an apprenticeship with one of Hong Kong's first diamond importers. Her creations soon drew the attention of friends, who asked her to design pieces for them. In 1998, Ong founded Carnet in partnership with gem dealer Avi Nagar, and went on to open an atelier in Hong Kong in 2003.

For Ong, designing jewellery is a vital form of self-expression. She finds it difficult to stop working, and is always looking forward to her next challenging project. "I am always happy to create a piece that represents my vision, and for the Carnet collector to wear it with great enjoyment."

She is currently working on a series called Carnet Tartan, in which she is using coloured diamonds, emeralds, amethysts and blue sapphires to recreate the fabric's pattern. Ong's description of the series is a good fit for all of her pieces: "It's wonderful, wearable, and a bit unexpected."