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All the Raj

MANJU JASTY — LUCKY GIRL — HAS BEEN COLLECTING fine jewelry practically since birth. “In Indian culture, if you’re a girl from a traditional family, they start building a jewelry trousseau as soon as you’re born,” says Jasty, who was born in India and grew up on Long Island. “There’s a very different mentality there. Anytime you go to a wedding or a big party, people get decked out in their jewels, whereas here, people tend to hold back unless it’s their event.” Indeed, Jasty, who launched her own collection of fine jewelry inspired by her native land in 2006, found that elaborate traditional pieces didn’t quite mesh with her Western wardrobe, particularly in her professional life in finance. “As a girl in banking, you try not to draw attention to yourself, but you still want to be feminine and fashionable,” says Jasty, who worked in structured finance at Barclays Capital in New York before going into design full-time. “So I would make earrings for myself that weren’t too obvious.” And she would channel her bonus money into her designs.

“Some people take a big trip or buy something special for themselves. I would always make a piece for myself,” she says. In fact, Jasty has dabbled in design



for years. Burned out from banking, she handed in her resignation in 2005 and headed back to India to navigate the insider network of jewelry artisans with the help of her gem-loving aunts. The resulting collection is full of show-stopping pieces, all in yellow and white gold, with ornate gem details fit for a modern maharani. The jewelry is steeped in Indian tradition — consider the peacock bangle, inspired by India’s national bird. And while price tags are hefty — Jasty’s suggested retail prices range from \$4,000 for a thin white gold and diamond bangle, to \$110,000 for a chunky Japanese coral and diamond necklace — the actual designs aren’t.

“My pieces are so much lighter than anything you would typically find in India,” says Jasty, who worked with craftsmen to achieve the desired weights in classic motifs. “In the beginning, they were like, ‘What is this kid trying to do?’ so there was a bit of push and pull. But now they see that it can work, having just enough gold to hold the gems.”

If Jasty had any doubts about leaving finance for the world of fine jewelry, she was vindicated when Barneys New York picked up her collection in fall 2007 after a couple of chance meetings with fashion director Julie Gilhart, whom she met at a Lanvin trunk show the very day she resigned from Barclays. A few months later, the two women ran into each other at a cocktail party. “Julie asked me what I was working on, and I said, ‘I’m not exactly sure, but today, I’m a jewelry designer.’”

— Jessica Iredale