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## Thai designers make their mark

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Face value: Del Parcthai designs high-end, contemporary pieces. His brand launched in 2008

Inside the Central Embassy, a luxury mall in Bangkok, a golden love seat from the Carpenters Workshop Gallery in London and a sculpture made from a Harley-Davidson motorbike formed the backdrop for Thomas Erber's annual Cabinet of Curiosities display.

On show were pieces from Thailand's contemporary jewellers including Del Parcthai and Patcharavipa Bodiratnangkura. Now these jewellery designers are finding exposure further afield. This winter, Mr Erber, a journalist turned curator, will host his next Cabinet at Colette, the concept store in Paris, showcasing both Del Parcthai and Patcharavipa Bodiratnangkura.

Mr Del Parcthai launched his brand in 2008. The domestic market for artisan products is quite small, he says, and he welcomes his international exposure.

Ms Patcharavipa Bodiratnangkura studied at the Chelsea College of Art and at Central Saint Martins, both in London, and returned to Bangkok last year to start her own company. Selling by appointment in Bangkok, she will present her next capsule collection at the Cabinet of Curiosities in Paris. She is also working on haute couture jewellery and will unveil her full collection in February.

Thailand has a lot to offer new designers, she says. There are "amazing local materials, rare items and one-of-a-kind collectors' gems".

Gonzague Zurstrassen, a Belgian designer based in Thailand, says the country is the world centre for coloured stones and manufacturing, with rough gems from Africa, Burma, Sri Lanka, Madagascar, Afghanistan and other countries passing through Thailand to be processed and then mounted.

"You would be surprised by how many famous brands manufacture their pieces in Thailand," he says. "It is the perfect workshop to inspire and create. It has a great history of fine craftsmanship and cultural richness."

After graduating from The Hoge Raad voor Diamant (HRD) in Antwerp, as a certified gemologist in 1996, Mr Zurstrassen became an independent diamond broker in Antwerp. Joining Fred Mouawad, the entrepreneur in Geneva, he took the reins of their Asian diamond operation in 1997 before becoming an independent designer and gem stone trader in 2009.

He works Thai culture into his bold designs that rely on large gemstones such as tourmaline, spessartines and diamonds. Mr Zurstrassen sells through his flagship gallery in Soneva Kiri, Thailand, and the Talisman Gallery at Harvey Nichols in London.

Despite the long history of craftsmanship in Thailand, Mr Zurstrassen believes that big businesses now dominate the industry, while independent jewellers are becoming hard to find.

"The past few years have seen the jewellery business shrink, with many players departing due to the economic downturn. Artisans are becoming a rarity," he says.

However, one Thai designer who is testing the waters in Bangkok is Noon Passama. Based in the Netherlands, where her pieces range in price from €200 to €7,000, she showed her designs for the first time on home soil at the Atta Gallery in July. The gallery is now selling her pieces.

Mr Zurstrassen is optimistic that the jewellery scene is beginning to change and that independent designers will benefit. "People want

something more personal, a true sign of luxury, uniqueness and rarity,” he says.

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