



# THE BLEND



**BEAUTY & JEWELS** VAN CLEEF & ARPELS brings flora to the fore. When did FLIP-FLOPS get so highfalutin? Inside GRAFF'S Mayfair workshop. The SOFT POWER of Louis Vuitton sneakers. CHANEL celebrates 100 years in London. In the studio with SLIM BARRETT. Fermentation shakes up SKINCARE. The colourful history of LIPSTICK

# LONDON IS SPLIT ALONG METALLIC LINES — ONE SIDE POLISHED BRASS AND GOLD, THE OTHER BRUSHED STEEL AND CHROME

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OSKAR KOHNEN, TUTTO BENE

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West London has always gravitated towards brass and gold, while the East now wholeheartedly embraces stainless steel. From the footrail of a fancy restaurant bar to the mirrors and antiques on King's Road, brass and gold is the preferred finish for the traditionalist and established. On the other hand, the cool kids, the creative class, seem to have found in stainless steel a representation of their ultra-utilitarian, hardwiring professional counterparts – the workers versus the owners, a story as old as mankind.

Now only very rarely do the two metals cross paths. But isn't it sad that this segregation still dominates design? Can a diehard St. John restaurant fan really not sit at a brass-detailed bar counter?

Stainless steel has lost some of its shine. First gaining traction in the 1920s and 30s through art deco and a fascination with sleek modernity, it became the backbone of professional-grade domesticity: Bauhaus tea sets, brushed countertops, German knives, Italian hobs. Its cool precision resurged in the noughties, as Apple updated plastic surfaces and reintroduced metal as a symbol not just of elegance, but of superiority. Stainless became shorthand for intelligence and innovation, claiming the future. Cars, phones and furniture – all sharper in steel.

Today, stainless steel is ubiquitous in the interior and collectible-design world. Few client mood boards that pass our desks miss a reference to Peter Zumthor's or Richard and Ruth Rogers' kitchens – and rightfully so. In our London apartment and office – a converted Victorian gym – we inherited a 1990s Ikea stainless kitchen. It works gracefully, in a hard-working way. However, having seen one too many sculptural 'collectible' chairs nobody will sit on, we sense the material's shine fading.

In tune with a pivot away from Scandinavian neutrality, the dial is swinging firmly back towards Italian sensuality – and with it, gold brings substance, weight and plenty of warmth. The Byzantine mosaics of Ravenna (1) understood this: gold tesserae – tiny glass mosaic backed with gold leaf – caught candlelight to sacred effect.

Still, metals are mostly used in aesthetic singularity. Long a faux pas, mixed metals aren't mastered by many. Most interiors shy away, choosing one metal and sticking with it. But maybe it's time to undo the binary – and explore the alchemy of contrast.

At New York's Demisch Danant gallery, we saw mixing with intent. Maria Pergay's Table Éventail from 1968 (5) layers brushed and gold-tinted steel with confident simplicity.

Look too at Paul Evans' Cityscape collection from 1975 (2): patchworks of chrome and brass that feel like miniature skylines, brutalist yet glittering.

Back in our Milan pied-à-terre pantry, we wanted the silver tone of steel but richer. We translated that idea into silver leaf. Anyone who's worked with leaf knows it curls, tears, floats away at a breath. Thankfully Maya Romanoff's 'Precious Metals' gave us a shortcut: craftspeople layer real silver, fragile sheet by sheet, with chopsticks on paper backing. The cubus now radiates deep, shifting tones – paired with a simple stainless top, shimmering but precise (3). Silver leaf's lineage – from Egyptian tombs to Chinese vessels to gilded altars – is a testament to metal's power to mark value, time, divinity.

Appliances can join the dialogue too. The La Cornue cooker, with brass handles on a steel body (7), becomes more than a stove – a totem of status.

On a grander stage, interiors themselves have become metal theatre. Hollein's Schullin jewellery shop in Vienna (1972-74) reveals a molten core of mixed metals (8); Philip Johnson's The Grill from 1959 (9), reborn in Midtown Manhattan, takes gilded restraint and turns up the volume: thousands of gold-plated chains pour from every window, catching daylight and lamp glow in molten shimmer. Each draft from the air conditioning and every passer-by sets that veil rippling, so that the metal feels alive, breathing with the room.

Just as Paco Rabanne's 1966 chain-mail mini skirt of interlinked gold and silver hearts (4) blurred fashion's metallic binaries, Heart with Brass Rim by Estrid Ericson (1952) quietly sums up our case for mixed metals (6). When Ericson founded Svenskt Tenn in 1924, she chose pewter for its affordability compared to silver – design both refined and reachable. But even a utilitarian heart beats warmer when edged in brass.

Metal has always told stories – of craft, function, prestige, meaning beyond the surface. It gathers fingerprints, reflects light, registers time. Polished or with patina, let's stop choosing sides and show some affection for contrast. **B**



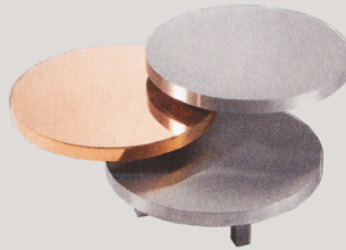
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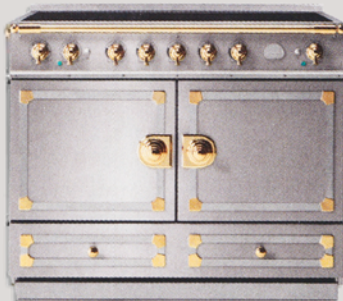
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1. The Byzantine mosaics of Ravenna; 2. Paul Evans Cityscape floor lamp; 3. Maya Romanoff's 'Precious Metals' in the Tutto Bene kitchen; 4. Paco Rabanne heart-paillettes chain-mail mini skirt; 5. Maria Pergay Table Éventail; 6. Estrid Ericson's Heart with Brass Rim; 7. La Cornue CornuFé 110; 8. Hollein's Schullin jewellery shop; 9. Philip Johnson's The Grill



## EDITOR'S LETTER

For this issue of *The Blend*, we celebrate no fewer than four centenaries. Last month, Chanel marked 100 years in the UK by restaging Nijinska's one-act 1924 ballet, *Le Train Bleu*, in the spectacular surroundings of the new V&A East Storehouse, home to a mere fraction of the museum's 2.8 million holdings. A spectacular contribution to the UK's civic landscape, East Storehouse is also home to the Picasso curtain created for the original Ballets Russes production, which featured costumes by Gabrielle Chanel. For the anniversary performance, dancers from the English National Ballet were dressed in contemporary interpretations of their Jazz Age forebears, closing the circle on a century of Chanel's style, which we explore in contributing editor Harriet Quick's absorbing article on page 56.

For our second centenary, we turn to Wetzlar in Germany, home to Leica, the original and best 35mm camera that has successfully shrugged off the era of film to focus (sorry) largely, but not exclusively, on digital photography – at which its present line excels. *The Blend* dispatched Charlie Teasdale to discover what's coming next from the brand. Turn to page 52.

Our third centenary? That belongs to Pedro García, the Alicante-based, family-owned shoemaker we celebrate in our story on the rise of the elevated flip-flop (p40). Sharing its 100th birthday is Longines' Spirit Zulu Time, the brand's first watch capable of displaying two time zones. You can read all about the model launched to mark the occasion on page 20.

Finding, preserving and displaying objets d'art serves as a quintessential cornerstone of the jeweller's craft, a process that unites the past with the present, and in the case of the examples we bring to these pages, the very future of the industry. You'll find consulting editor Felix Bischof's pick of the very best on page 64.

Finally, don't miss our regular dispatch from the world of wellness and self-care, The Mend (page 31), where we investigate the powers of fermentation to aid good skin, and salute 10 years of Dr. Barbara Sturm's groundbreaking Hyaluronic Serum.

BILL PRINCE, *Editor-in-Chief*, THE BLEND

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**1 Dr. Barbara Sturm celebrates 10 years of her pioneering serum (p39)**

Photograph by Cameron Bensley  
Dr. Barbara Sturm Hyaluronic Serum, from £265 (30ml)

**2 Sense check: Brazilian jewellery designer Fernando Jorge (p30)**

Photograph by Rory van Millingen  
Fernando Jorge Vertex collection necklace in yellow gold with white diamonds, POA

**3 Van Cleef & Arpels pays tribute to flowers blooming further afield (p26)**

Photograph by Cameron Bensley  
Van Cleef & Arpels Fleurs d'Hawaï pendant necklace in yellow gold with peridots and diamonds, £16,000