



In An Age Of Rampant Greenwashing, What Makes For A Sustainable Jewellery Brand?

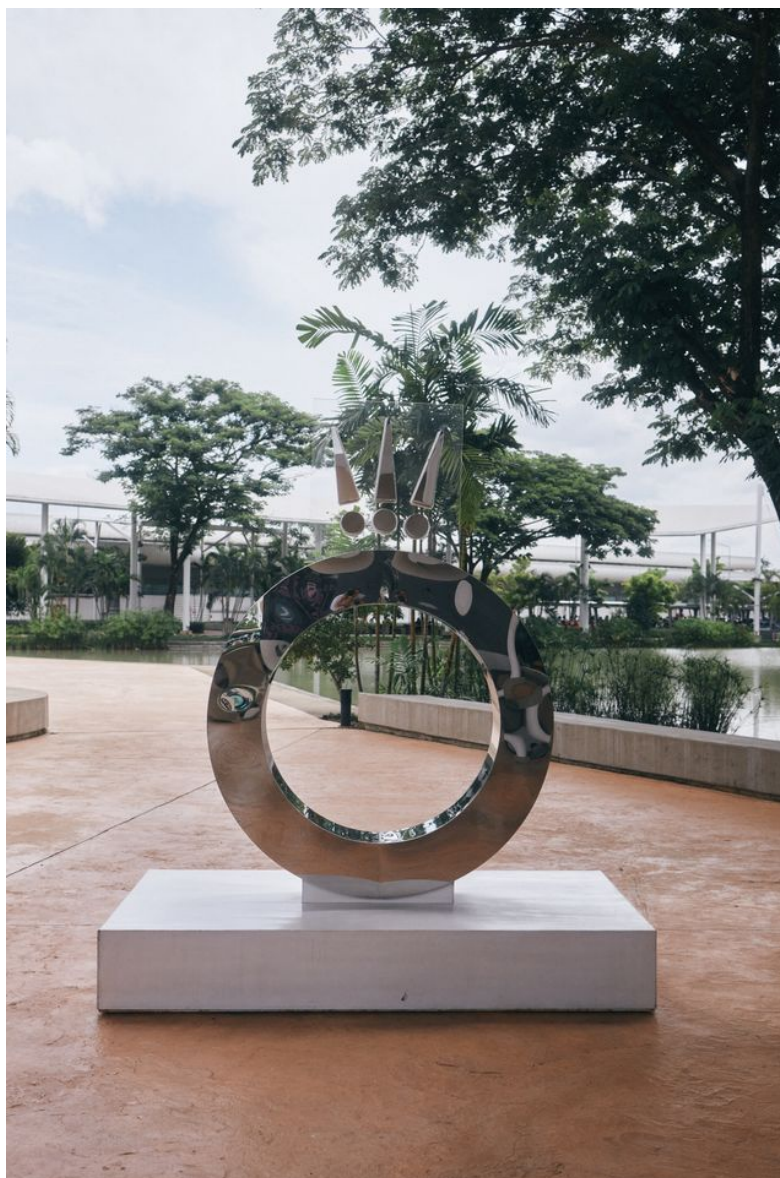


The global jewellery industry is, by all measures, vast. Its current value is estimated to sit around £280 billion and is projected to grow to around £430 billion over the next decade. And yet, when you're looking at a piece in store, what glitters may well be gold, but the standards around how it's landed there aren't guaranteed to be.

Indeed, jewellery's sustainability discourse couldn't be more crucial than it is right now. With the nature of the industry's supply chains – which, at root, are largely reliant on the energy-intensive extraction of raw mineral resources from the earth, a practice with a notoriously negative collateral impact on local ecosystems and communities – and serious issues around the near-impossibility of accurate traceability, jewellery businesses are facing up to quandaries that require serious systemic and infrastructural rewiring to adequately address.

While the complexities involved in recalibrating such rhizomatic supply and production chains have fuelled a perception of the jewellery industry as slow off the mark to address these issues – or, worse, apathetic in the face of them – there are notable examples of brands doing impressive work to prove how much can be done with adequate commitment. And we're not just talking about nimble upstarts. One of the most impactful case studies is the world's largest jewellery brand by volume: Pandora.





Pandora statue at the brand's Chiang Mai crafting facility.
Sofi Adams

What Pandora has over them, though, is its scale – and with that scale comes the possibility of industry-shaping impact. “Our responsibility isn’t just about what goes on within these four walls – it’s also about the footprint that is left by all of the companies that work with us,” says Berta de Pablos-Barbier, Pandora’s chief marketing officer. “How can we motivate them that this is the right thing to do? That it’s not just about economics, but rather a question of ecological responsibility and values?”

“That’s why a big part of our work is to also speak up about our learnings and to share insights. We don’t look at this as a competitive secret,” Twomey-Madsen adds. “We are part of the Watch & Jewellery Initiative 2030, which was launched by Kering and Cartier, and on which we have a board seat. It’s about collectively trying to instigate a kind of multiplier or ripple effect.”

“And also showing that if we have managed to do it at our scale, anybody can,” de



Pablos-Barbier says.



But what does this look like in practice? How does this mentality and approach inform the end-to-end process of an accessible luxury giant that puts out more than 100 million hand-finished pieces of jewellery a year? A visit to Pandora's Innovation Centre, another hi-spec campus situated on the edge of Bangkok, offers valuable insight.

It's here at this typically top-secret hub that creative design, technical research and product testing merge, guided by a central ethos of sustainability. "Taking sustainability into account is a key part of how we can make great products even better," Elise Sithpaseuth, Pandora's innovation director, explains, "but that of course comes with its challenges. We have to find new materials, new capabilities, and they all need to abide by environmental, social and governance guidelines."

"We have to be very selective when it comes to the partners we work with," she continues. "And then when it comes to the materials themselves, we have developed a complex scorecard that analyses criteria with regard to sustainability, environmental impact, social impact, ethical impact and so on."





Pandora's Talisman collection.
Courtesy of Pandora



Pandora's Talisman collection.
Courtesy of Pandora

Pandora's newly launched Talisman collection features artfully "weathered" coin-like medallions and pendants – each piece being a testament to the rigour and attention-to-detail invested in the development of a Pandora piece. Prototyping involves unfathomably precise CAD technologies and two different kinds of hi-spec 3D printing machines – capable of rendering tiny cracks and surface textures in minuscule recyclable wax tokens – to choices made around material composition: man-made mother-of-pearl; recycled sterling silver and 14k gold; hand-set, lab-grown diamonds.

The results are products that bear the hallmarks of any desirable jewellery object – they resonate with the aesthetic and emotional sensibilities of the wearer, which is ultimately what makes you want to buy and wear them. But they're also about as guilt-free as



jewellery can come, artefacts of a more sustainable process that is always being pushed and developed further.

“This is what, for us, points to the future of luxury,” Twomey-Madsen says. “It’s all of the fascination with a product that we’ve known about for years, plus the fascination with smart innovation that allows us to arrive at the same materials and results – just in a way that’s much, much gentler on the planet.”

