

# Designer Spotlight: Liv Ballard's Red Carpet Worthy Jewelry

by Michelle Tay 05/03/14 5:57 PM EST

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Liv Ballard and the Capvt Mundi pendant of her design (Courtesy Liv Ballard)



Rebecca Rigg (with Simon Baker) wearing Liv Ballard

The recent 86th Annual Academy Awards was a star-studded affair with many eye-catching jewels by high-end houses such as **Bulgari**, **Harry Winston**, and **Tiffany & Co.** sharing the red carpet with the A-listers they accessorized. But there was another jeweler sharing the spotlight that night: **Liv Ballard**, whose Roman-inspired gold jewelry hung off the neck and wrapped the wrist and finger of actress **Rebecca Rigg** — in a black Givenchy gown, alongside her husband and star of “The Mentalist” **Simon Baker** — at the Vanity Fair Oscar Party.

Counting **Jennifer Aniston**, **Elton John**, as well as some European royalty and rock stars among her celebrity clients, the Los Angeles- and Rome-based Ballard, whose eponymous label is almost nine years old, spoke to Blouin Artinfo fresh off of her latest Oscar showing about how her bold, contemporary designs using precious colored stones and yellow gold help sets her apart in the crowded and competitive field of designer jewelry.

“In most cases I think of jewelry more like sculpture — a lot of them are built,” she said. Having studied art in university, where she worked with clay, Ballard said she started designing jewelry as an unconscious but perhaps natural progression. “I love jewelry and I think visually. It was something I wanted to explore. These days, during my design process, I still work things out in clay when I need to.”

Here’s more of the interview:

### What inspires you?

The way most of my pieces come about is that I’m usually looking to express a feeling in what I’m doing. When that process starts it’s a combination of feeling and symbolism that grow at the same time. The Sacro Vincolo rings are the obvious example of that, as they represent a feeling of separateness and togetherness at the same time.

### What sets your designs apart from the rest?

A lot of my pieces are informed historically and mythically and are highly symbolic. While I don’t want it to be necessarily obvious for the person picking it up and appreciating it, it’s the feeling behind it that gives it meaning.

### Tell us about your globe designs, which are part of your permanent collection.

It was the first piece I designed, and it’s always a great seller for me. It was really about wanderlust and a longing to travel that set that piece in motion. A lot of my customers move around a fair bit, and I like the idea that they are interactive and very playful pieces. What surprised me somewhat as I became more involved in developing the globe is that I realized it really represents our planet. In one piece I used different sapphires with gradating colors of blue to reflect the different depths of the oceans; in another I added diamond for polar ice caps because I wanted to make a statement about [global warming].

### Why are you so fascinated with ancient Roman imagery?

I’m fortunate enough to have worked in Rome for the last seven years. Being in Rome is a visual feast where the eye is informed by the great beauty of even a casual thing. Just walking down the street is going to provoke something in your mind that you want to explore, and it’s a liberating experience for me.

### And what’s it like working with Roman artisans?

The Roman goldsmiths have a very long tradition of working with cast metals and pressed stones and their quality of work is unparalleled. The atelier I work with goes back for generations. One thing I love so much about it is that no matter how unorthodox an idea I might present to the artisans, they never say they can’t do it. They will always help me find a way to realize it, even present and suggest new things for me to work with, and I just love that spirit. I spoke no Italian when I arrived, but now I can speak fluently about jewelry with them. They’re so generous; they just want to help you realize your ideas.

### What are your favorite materials to work with?

I’m very drawn to sapphires and emeralds — and gold. A lot of pieces we do are cast, like sculpture. I love the soft sculptural quality of gold, which just seems to want to melt with a new body. I love the warmth of the color and the way it feels against your skin. As much of a visual thing it is, in the final analysis it’s also more of a tactile thing: The person has to wear it, so it’s important to have a sensuality to it.

### What’s the most unique piece you’ve ever made?

I’m working on three pieces that are again highly symbolic — one of them reflects my interest in devices that keep away something bad. We live in an age of anxiety [but] what are we trying to protect ourselves from? The other two are pieces that are loaded with feeling and meaning but I can’t reveal them yet!

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