



Royal Jewel

Meet working princess Lucia Odescalchi, a designer who takes gems—but not her title—seriously.

Portrait by TOMMASO SARTORI

Don't call Lucia Odescalchi a *principessa*. Although the Italian jewelry designer officially landed the title after marrying Carlo Odescalchi in 1987 (his family traces its noble lineage, which includes a pope, back to medieval Italy), the aristocratic label makes her cringe. As does a photographer's suggestion that she sit for a portrait for this story in front of the Van Dyck painting that hangs in an ornate wing of the family's home, a 17th-century baroque palazzo designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and located in the center of Rome. (She begrudgingly grants the request.) "I need to be where there's natural light," Odescalchi says, pointing out that she, her husband and two children don't live among the bronze cherubs and pious Renaissance and baroque paintings of the traditional wing but in a series of adjacent, minimalist-inspired rooms filled with modern art and sleek moldings.

Understatement, albeit of a rather privileged variety, is what the 41-year-old most prizes, both at home and in her contemporary jewelry line. Naturally, bling has no place in her designs, which incorporate subdued metals like steel chain mail, 18-karat matte gold and oxidized silver with such muted gems as brown diamonds and rough-cut rock crystal. "I don't like jewelry that's shiny," Odescalchi says.

Nor does she like the limelight, which is where she—along with other family members—found herself last November, when Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes held their wedding extravaganza at one of the Odescalchi family's castles, located on Lake Bracciano. Although Lucia and Carlo didn't attend the celebrity nuptials, the designer went to a luncheon for the couple hosted by the Odescalchi clan. True to form, she resisted gifting Holmes with one of her baubles, fearing the actress would think it crass. But the worldwide attention sparked by the event still piqued interest in her line; her Web site went from getting 100 hits per day to 2,000 during the media frenzy.

A former runway model for Giorgio Armani, Valentino and Gianfranco Ferré, Odescalchi discovered a passion for baubles nearly a decade ago after a passing interest in jewelry led her to pursue gemology and goldsmith courses. In 1999 she showed a few early designs to her friend Armani, who snapped up a choker crafted from mother-of-pearl discs and coral branches and then sold it in his spring 2000 collection under his own label. After two seasons of collaborating with him, Odescalchi officially debuted her own line of handcrafted pieces in 2000. Her signature designs include earrings of cascading hammered-gold discs, each centered by a pinhead-size brown diamond, and a necklace with mother-of-pearl chain links and a pavé diamond clasp.

She has remained one of Italy's best-kept secrets, selling in a handful of shops in Milan and Rome and in the United States at Barneys New York. The 2,000 pieces she produces each year are staples for her tony Italian clientele, including costume designer Tatiana Romanoff and socialites Domitilla Getty and Dominique Radziwill. Cristiana Torre, accessories director of Fendi and a client, says that Odescalchi's mix of different and unexpected materials keeps the designs fresh. "Her jewelry is easy to wear, especially for women who work and want something modern and tasteful but not too overt," she says.

Though showy designs have never been her style, Odescalchi is beginning to incorporate bolder, more important stones into her work, including colored diamonds, emeralds and sapphires as well as the occasional unusual specimen like uvarovite, a rare bright green garnet. "I'm becoming more courageous," she admits. "My pieces stand out, but never in bad taste. There's always a sense of harmony."

—COURTNEY COLAVITA

Clockwise from top: Lucia Odescalchi's 18k yellow gold, silver and brown diamond earrings, \$4,275; 18k yellow gold and silver earrings, \$2,505, at Barneys New York, New York, 212.826.8900; Lucia Odescalchi at home.

Odescalchi found herself in the lime-light when Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes held their wedding at one of her family's castles.

