

A Feast for the Eyes

Even an A-list clientele can’t outshine Nadine Ghosn’s fun and food-filled fine jewellery.



NADINE GHOSN

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Nadine Ghosn

Surprise cameos aren’t the only reasons Drake’s music video for *First Person Shooter* had us hitting the pause button. The Canadian rapper’s on-screen drip also got us trying to sneak a peek at a particular white gold dog chain. Weighing over four pounds, the custom necklace featuring 50 carats of diamonds, glistened on Drizzy as he spat his meanest verses. Lucky for us, he isn’t the type to gatekeep. He name-dropped one of his jewellers in the lyrics. Nadine Ghosn – not “Christine, Justine, Kathleen, Charlene, Pauline, Claudine” – is already a regular in the celebrity jewellery circuit, from a *Shut-Up* earring worn by Beyoncé to a wired earphone-inspired necklace for the late Karl Lagerfeld. But it was the *Veggie Burger* ring in 2017 that first spotlighted Ghosn and her then year-old eponymous line,

Nadine Ghosn Fine Jewellery (NGFJ). Co-signed by Nigo, the six-part design reimagines a burger bun stuffed with a veggie patty, onion, tomato and lettuce in rose gold, diamonds, sapphires, tsavorites and rubies. After winning Best in Innovative at the Couture Show in Las Vegas, Ghosn’s tongue-in-cheek stackable ring caught the eye of McDonald’s who commissioned the *Bling Mac* ring – a bold zhuzh up of the fast food joint’s menu staple. “It was a very conventional landscape when I entered [the industry] and I think that’s sometimes forgotten,” Ghosn says. “For me, the *Burger* rings represent this movement towards less conventional pieces that are expressive of our culture and daily life. More people now are empowered to do their own thing and take risks.” Despite initial naysayers and a lack of formal training in jewellery design, the Stanford graduate and former Hermès trainee has since built a cult following by transforming food and ordinary objects such as ballpoint pens, sushi rolls and Lego into wearable pieces. In *Youtensils*, chopsticks, straws, forks and spoons become key inspirations. According to Ghosn, it goes deeper than just evoking nostalgia. “Every piece has a story. Every piece represents a moment in my life and every piece has a motto.” Ghosn gleefully points out the *Pencil* and bike chain-like bracelets on her wrist. While she doesn’t like to play favourites, she admits to reaching for these designs the most. “The *Pencil* is a reminder that I write my own story and pave my own path.” In fact, hers is always engraved with a goal that she’s striving for. Meanwhile, the intricate 260-component *Lifecycle Pavée* motivates her to keep moving. Ghosn feels grateful that her clients share a mindset rather than a specific age or background. “My client is someone who applauds thinking differently,” Ghosn shares. “It could be an artist, chef, rapper... it could be anyone. But it is someone who paves their own way.”



MANIFESTO: What brings you to Hong Kong’s Art Basel?

NADINE GHOSN: Hong Kong has been one of my bases since I started the brand. It’s a city with a lot of energy and I really wanted to bring my world here at the right time. For me, it makes sense to do it during Art Basel as my pieces are quite artistic. It’s like sculptural art that you can wear everyday.

M It’s your first time officially showcasing NGFJ in the city. How has that experience been like?

NG It has been a great experience! It’s been very energising to meet so many people and see my pieces through their eyes. My process is very isolated. I’m a one woman show. I do everything from production and creation to storytelling. Having people to bounce my ideas off of gives me a dialogue to work with. I learn a lot through this process.

M Before starting NGFJ, you were at Hermès. Does this experience impact your work today?

NG At Hermès, I learnt the power of slow-paced marketing. They keep their brand DNA, know what they offer and tie it all back to the same stories. They have a very long-term vision and that’s the same way I see my brand.

M What motivated you to pursue jewellery design?

NG There was a moment when I really didn’t know where I wanted to go in my career. I read a self-help book that said: When you are in your flow, what are you doing? For me, it’s always been jewellery. Since I was a kid, I loved jewellery. My parents would lose me for an hour because I would rearrange my jewellery box. My jewellery represented key moments, people and experiences. That’s never changed.

M We love that your designs awaken the inner child. What were you like growing up?

NG As a child, I was very hyper and smiley. I find it interesting that my creativity moves towards the child

inside of me. It’s a very healing process but what I love is that it also feels healing for others. As we get older, we lose that child-like nature: a pure and curious entity within ourselves. I love awakening that.

M Your collections embrace trompe l’oeil. What about this speaks to you?

NG It’s about shifting perspectives. I have this weakness for underdogs and I think this translates to how I do jewellery. Why shouldn’t a burger be represented in fine jewellery? What makes a burger less likely than a zipper, flower or butterfly?

M And this message was clear from your first collection. It’s quite rare for designers, especially with an aesthetic so unique, to have this confidence so early on...

NG The reason was that I was literally thinking: What do I want to wear? I basically design for myself. To this day, I don’t create something I won’t want to wear. Thankfully, that creates an aesthetic that is pretty strong. Although, I was told that I was going to be a one-hit wonder. People said that I would be known as the *burger girl* or I won’t create another collection with the same response. That made me more *hungry* to prove them wrong.

M Talk us through your *Youtensils* collection.

NG It goes back to hidden heroes and things that we overlook everyday. I like things that are rich in culture and have a commentary to it. Forks, knives, spoons and chopsticks... it’s something we all come across, but I’ve never really seen it perfected or glamorised.

M What’s the story behind the *Fork with Spaghetti* bracelet?

NG My pieces are made in Italy. So, when we started talking about food, my team was like we need one with spaghetti. We are now working on one that is bolognese. They also talked about carbonara because we can throw some diamonds and pink sapphires in there. I love that it’s so fun!



M NGFJ is a one-woman band. What have you learnt about yourself through the years?

NG First, I learnt that all my energy was external... I would use it to achieve but I wouldn’t spend it getting to know myself internally. I realised that I’m a mix of introversion and extroversion and I need moments to myself. Second of all, I’ve worked a lot on the inner voice. Being an entrepreneur, especially when you are alone, it’s quite draining. A lot of people don’t think about it that way. They see your success but don’t understand all the things that happen behind it. It requires very strong personal growth to achieve professional growth.

M What can we anticipate from NGFJ?

NG There are two people I want to collaborate with. If I can solidify those partnerships this year, that would be my goal from a professional standpoint.

M And personally?

NG Personally, I would love to commit to spending more time with myself because that’s where the creativity comes from. What I want is to travel less and establish more of a routine in a place where I feel like home. Right now, it’s Singapore. It’s a place I have created in, curated and it brings me energy. www.instagram.com/nadineghosnjewelry

M And how do you personally style your pieces?

NG I’m a stacker! Everyone who knows me knows that. I’m about wearing my pieces at all times... sauna, sports, whatever. It’s also the best way to test my products to make sure that it’s stuff you can wear every day.

M By choice, you have no retail partners. Why?

NG It’s a difficult situation in the landscape of manufacturing. There is a lot of demand but very few people can create what I want so the price is quite elevated. Retailers take 20 to 40 per cent margin so unless I increase

my prices even more, it wouldn’t be possible. I’d rather have fewer clients and direct relationships than spread myself too thin. And honestly, I think the retail footprint has changed. I don’t think it is a necessity anymore.

M What do you wish you saw more of in the industry?

NG The way things are today, big brands monopolise the press and they pay for celebrity endorsements so it’s really competitive. Any small jeweller can’t compete with that. What I would love to see more of is a celebration, preservation and support of young talent. I wouldn’t be where I am today without people supporting me. I feel grateful!