

# A PORT IN A DIVA STORM

Making a statement with fabulous jewellery is as much about attitude as bank balance. With a premium collection recently launched in Portofino referencing *La Dolce Vita* and its movie-star divas, **Susan Skelly** discovers that a little bit of audacious goes a long way.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES



The gardens of La Cervara, near Portofino



Bulgari jewellery in the making; models channel stars of the silver screen (above) such as Marilyn Monroe (left)

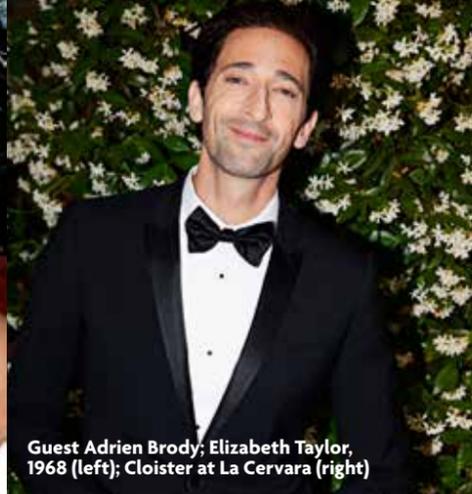


Elizabeth Taylor knew how to rock a rock. She wore statement pieces around her neck, on her fingers, dangling with chandelier chic from her earlobes, fixed in her hair, and pinned on sashes and frocks. Often, all at the same time.

These days, the Hollywood star's jewels would have their own Facebook page: the 33.19ct Krupp diamond ring; the Taj Mahal diamond necklace; the King Farouk bracelet; the La Peregrina pearl; the 69.42ct Taylor-Burton diamond.

Taylor ordered from Bulgari, Boucheron, Chopard, Cartier, Tiffany & Co, Asprey, Van Cleef and Arpels, and adored nothing better than a gift of jewellery. Her love affair with jewels was not frivolous. She had a depth of knowledge to back up her addiction. Demanding, discerning and often a hard bargainer, she was a true connoisseur who took endless delight in the sight of a beribboned box. ("Any box can be interesting to me!" she once said.) Jewels arrived for birthdays, engagements (yes, she had a few), anniversaries, in apology (lots of making up) and for no reason at all. As she explained in her 2002 book, *Elizabeth Taylor: My Love Affair With Jewelry*, "I can't deny that Richard [Burton] gave me some spectacular gifts on birthdays and Christmas, but in truth he was so romantic that he'd use any excuse to give me a piece of jewelry. He'd give me 'It's Tuesday, I love you' presents. 'It's a beautiful day' presents. 'Let's go for a walk, I want to buy you something' presents."

As it turns out, Taylor herself is the gift that keeps on giving for Bulgari, whose artisans made many statement pieces for her



Guest Adrien Brody; Elizabeth Taylor, 1968 (left); Cloister at La Cervara (right)



Divas bedecked in jewels wander the abbey gardens; Elizabeth Taylor's book (left)



(the association no doubt nurtured by Burton's killer line: "The only word Elizabeth knows in Italian is Bulgari.")

Fittingly, an event held in June to preview the premium Italian brand's Diva Collection - inspired by the movie stars who wore Bulgari jewels during the *Dolce Vita* years - was as overflowing with surprise and spectacle as Taylor's jewellery boxes. New brand ambassador and muse Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, chic in navy cocktail silk and up-do, chatted easily with media and guests. She made the interesting observation that the modern celebrity cannot be a diva. Divas had an air of mystery, she explained, because you never really knew what they did all day. Whereas today's technology - the smartphone - notes their every foible, their every move.

Adrien Brody added a nice, dissolute touch to proceedings, and the surprise entertainment was another diva, Diana Ross, taking to

TAYLOR, BRODY & DIVAS PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; MARILYN & MODELS: DAVID ATLAN; JEWELLERY: COURTESY BULGARI

the stage enveloped in a shimmering white tulle cape, shrugged off to reveal a snug white and gold sequined gown.

Released just last month, the Diva Collection reflects if not the actual pieces then the *flavour* of Elizabeth Taylor's most celebrated jewellery. A notable innovation is a kinetic conical design feature inspired by the eye make-up Taylor wore as the passionate and imperious Cleopatra, in the movie that, 50 years ago, triggered her hot love affair with her serial jewel-buying husband Richard Burton. (*Cleopatra*, too, is having another moment in the sun with the release of a 50th-anniversary Blu-ray restoration.)

The glittering launch event took place in a spectacular 14th-century Benedictine abbey, La Cervara, perched above the sea between Santa Margherita and Portofino on the Italian Riviera, long the playground of the jet set. Its fragrant gardens were a study in >



Bulgari brand ambassador Carla Bruni-Sarkozy (far left); event invitation (left); a rubellite necklace fit for a princess (below)

gemstone hues – emerald hedge mazes and quirky topiary, ruby and amethyst bougainvillea entwining arches and columns, pink tourmaline hydrangeas, table centrepieces of citrus fruits the colour of yellow diamonds, and a sea turning inky sapphire blue as day became night.

Gliding through nature's colour-matched stage were 25 glamorous models channelling stars of the silver screen – Ava Gardner, Marilyn Monroe, Sophia Loren, Brigitte Bardot, Audrey Hepburn – in costumes courtesy of the Micol Fontana Foundation. Bare backs, sculpted arms and flawless décolletage were a lustrous backdrop for the jewels.

The big-ticket items included a 43ct pendant with a cushion-shaped sapphire (and a \$2.5m price tag); a necklace of pebble-shaped rubellites with peridots, spessartites and pavé diamonds; a voluptuous Takhti-cut emerald ring inset with rubies and brilliant-cut diamonds. And, totally lust-worthy, a bracelet of six lozenge-like emeralds separated by spinels, rubies and diamonds.

The models, though, had met their match. The guests, most of them the jeweller's big-spending clients from around the world, were decked out in their own high-wattage jewels, all with fabulous stories to tell.

**BULGARI IS FAMOUS** for its colours and cuts, for its daring and seductive combinations of rubies, spinels and rubellites; peridots, tourmalines and amethysts; pearls, turquoise and aquamarines; emeralds, diamonds and sapphires. The pieces employ 360 degrees of creativity, from the ground to the red-carpet gala, playing with shape, cut, colour and design. Semiprecious stones are as saluted by the house of Bulgari as are their precious brethren.

These are jewels, mused Mauro Di Roberto, head of Bulgari's jewellery business unit, holding court ahead of the June festivities, for women who are bold, audacious and self-confident.

Indeed, he confesses to feeling at times despondent when the jewellery fairs he attends so frequently offer up endless takes on the predictable: a precious stone encircled by diamonds. He sees his artisans as curators of a gallery of gemstones.

"Rubellite and peridot, for example, give out the most beautiful light depending on the way they are cut," he explained. "Semiprecious stones can give you a lot more to play with. They have an identity, an emotion. Each stone has to talk."

Those two, in particular, are starting a conversation. Rubellite's cost by carat has grown by more than 200 per cent in the past two years due to its scarcity; while peridot, extracted mainly in Afghanistan and Pakistan, has been difficult to bring to market.

Jewellers sell dreams. And dreams need stories with strong characters, which is why Elizabeth Taylor, who died in March 2011, remains such an icon. It's a tough call as to what her greatest love was – men or jewels.

"Elizabeth Taylor represented an era," said Di Roberto. "She was a rare woman in the sense that she was very strong, knew exactly what she wanted. The way she wore jewellery was not traditional, not formal. She had a way of wearing jewellery as if it were part of her. It reflected her lifestyle and personality, and it complemented what she was wearing. You can see how safe and strong she felt in wearing whatever she put on."

Yet not all of Taylor's most cherished pieces were door-stoppers. Along with the famous Bulgari cabochon sapphire and diamond sautoir, and the much-photographed emerald and diamond suite, were sentimental favourites such as the first brooch she bought for her mother when she was 12 or 13; a gold charm bracelet with medallions for each of her children; a diamond and emerald monkey necklace with matching earrings from Michael Jackson; and yet another necklace made of ivory, turn-of-the-century theatre tokens, willed to her by Hollywood costume supremo Edith Head.

"I've never, never thought of my jewelry as trophies," Taylor wrote in *Elizabeth Taylor: My Love Affair With Jewelry*. "I'm here to take care of them and to love them."

She just hoped that when she died and they went to auction, whoever bought them would give them a really good home. ➤



# Jewel of the Riviera

Portofino is as breathtaking as the Krupp diamond: a jewel in the Italian Riviera's crown, a pocket port of iris blue, a marina crammed with gleaming cruisers, runabouts and schooners, and the shore clustered with narrow buildings painted the rich shades of ancient ochre.

## EAT

### LA TERRAZZA

*Hotel Splendido, 16 Salita Baratta.  
(0185) 267 801. hotelsplendido.com*

The heady scent of jasmine and geranium hits you first, then the spectacular view of the entrance to Portofino and its A-list yachts. As sunset becomes indigo moonshine on a summer's night, you just know you are part of something special. This is the Christmas tree star of special-occasion dining, as much for ambience as food. The setting is gold-plated, the service serious, the food, deft (and, yes, expensive), the wine list extensive (and even more expensive). Beef carpaccio served with truffle slices and paper-fine parmesan wafers; spaghetti with tuna roe "sawdust" has the most intense tomatoes imaginable (there is also Spaghetti alla Elizabeth Taylor, with fresh tomatoes from San Marzano, Sorrento and Pachino). The sea is also well represented.

### CHUFLAY BAR RESTAURANT

*1 Piazza Martiri dell'Olivetta.  
(0185) 267 802. hotelsplendido.com*

Honest food and people-watching, lunch and dinner, a stone's throw from the waterfront, as the boating and celebrity crowd seeks out food as classy as their vessels. The signature Insalata Chufly is food as medicine: char-grilled eggplant, zucchini, capsicum and endive, with radicchio, creamy herbed goat's cheese and a rich balsamic

dressing. Pesto is a regional specialty, so marry it with one of several pastas on offer. Oh, and a glass of the house vermentino, please waiter.

### DA PUNY

*5 Piazza Martiri dell'Olivetta. (0185) 269 037.*

Da Puny is the choice of locals for its longevity and simplicity. Signature dishes are its pesto pappardelle, salt-crusted bream (which tastes as if it's jumped from port to plate) and mixed seafood appetisers. Sit and watch those who haven't booked being turned away.

## SEE & DO

### SANTA MARGHERITA LIGURE

Spend a day browsing this picturesque port, a big sister to Portofino. There are boutiques, perfumeries, cafes, gelateria and restaurants such as Da U Batti (2 Via Jacopo Ruffini; closed Wed), whose red prawn dish is a drawcard; and perched on the hillside, Cigae (58 Via San Lorenzo). Regular ferries run to Portofino, Rapallo and San Fruttuoso. Villa Durazzo (3 Piazzale San Giacomo, villadurazzo.it) was built in the 17th century and offers neat gardens and a glimpse of the faded glory of the nobility. The palace is a showcase of *tromp l'oeil*, stuccos, Genoese mosaic floors and period furniture.

### SAN FRUTTUOSO & CAMOGLI

The San Fruttuoso inlet can be reached only by ferry, a short hop from Santa Margherita Ligure

or Portofino. There is an abbey to visit for those who feel like a climb, and deckchairs or sunbeds can be hired for the day – or just stay for an hour or two on the gravelly beach. Otherwise, take the ferry to the charming fishing village of Camogli. Wander up the hill to the town centre to chance upon a street of market stalls. From there, it's a quick train ride back to Santa Margherita Ligure.

## DAYTRIPS

Head out of Portofino by yacht or motorboat to the Cinque Terre, 18km of rocky coastline with bays and beaches – and the five hamlets of Monterosso al Mare, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola and Riomaggiore. Or drive to Portovenere and the Gulf of Poets, which inspired such writers as Byron, Shelley and DH Lawrence. Genoa, the mediaeval city of palaces, is another rewarding daytrip, fleshed out with lunch at Zeffirino (20 Via XX Settembre) or Chichibio (20/R Via David Chiossone).

## STAY

### EIGHT HOTEL PARAGGI

*8 Via Paraggi a Monte, Santa Margherita Ligure. (0185) 289 961. paraggi.eighthotels.it*

Paraggi is a little cove between Portofino and Santa Margherita Ligure. The boutique hotel is a sophisticated refurbished 19th-century villa with just 13 rooms. An attic option, with a white, clay and mauve colour palette, makes an almost alarming first impression as a doll's house, but quickly reveals remote-controlled sliding skylights that bring the space in and offer star-gazing. Perhaps its best feature is a private beach right in front with a dedicated beach concierge to organise towels, drinks and umbrella etiquette. Okay, it's not in Portofino, but it's only a 25-minute walk around a beautiful headland; alternatively, there's a bus, €1.50 (\$2.20) or a taxi, €35 (\$51). From €490 (\$717). 🌐

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