

Get with the (CSR) programme

Did your New Year goals include living more sustainably, reducing your impact on the environment, and living more ethically? Is your goal to think globally and act locally? Perhaps this year you are compiling a corporate social responsibility report for your company. By **The Goldsmiths' Company Assay Office**

The debate surrounding ethical jewellery is getting louder – as your green-living goals are bedded in, and traction builds regarding ethical interests, we round up the key recent occurrences in the industry, and look at the current picture and the potential gains over the forthcoming months.

In Spring 2016 *Fair Luxury*, the UK's first responsible jewellery conference took place at The Goldsmiths' Centre. It was organised by Flux, an independent group of changemakers in the jewellery industry and sold out. Summer 2016 saw retail giant and high street stalwart Argos launch Fairtrade Gold rings in stores nationwide.

This time last year jeweller and activist Greg Valerio, who formed Cred in 1996 and Valerio Jewellery in 2015, was awarded an MBE in the Queen's New Years' Honour list 2016 for his work in Fairtrade Gold.

Excitingly, 2016 also saw an expansion in the roster of Fairtrade certified gold mines. Fairtrade mines based in Peru were joined by the first mining co-operative in Africa to become Fairtrade certified - the Syanyonja

Artisan Miners' Alliance (SAMA) in Uganda.

Fairtrade gold was first launched in 2011, and where demand for it since had been predominantly led by jewellers with wider use amongst high street names, the recent launch of the first Fairtrade Gold ingots in Switzerland, the Fairtrade Foundation's continued work to encourage consumers to choose Fairtrade Gold, plus the buying power of ethically minded millennials add up to see both larger market share, and a stronger demand for it crystallise this year? Furthermore, will that demand be led by consumers?

The Goldsmiths' Company Assay Office was the first assay office to apply the Fairtrade stamp in 2011. The Fairtrade Mark is a certification mark and a registered trademark of Fairtrade International, so it is licensed on products which meet international Fairtrade standards, and makers have to apply to use it.

We now hallmark the work created by around 70% of makers who are permitted to have the Fairtrade Mark applied. From the London office's perspective, they have seen the numbers of articles marked increase



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2000% since they first applied it six years ago.

Its credentials (as well as the Fairmined mark) work because of the system in place to manage application, whereas the common 'recycled' symbol is in the public domain and not trademarked, so anyone could use it without sanction. Yet, numbers of articles which the assay office marked with the Fairtrade approval remained steady in 2016 compared with 2015.

Does the lack of notable growth last year tell us something about interest in Fairtrade metal, or reflect a quieter industry as a whole? The Fairtrade Foundation reports that the number of businesses working with Fairtrade Gold has continued to increase but at a slower rate than the previous year.

Ethically minded millennials, otherwise known as Generation Y, are the largest generation in western history. Reports have revealed them to be most concerned with ethical brand values when making a purchase, and willing to pay extra for sustainable offerings. It's clear that future retail success depends on retailers staying relevant to their customers.

However, who has the most to spend? The 'Grey Pound' is strong, especially when you consider high student debt and house prices being out of reach for first time buyers. Might it seem unwise to focus on their tastes, and seek success entirely from those born 1980 – 2000?

Rebecca Winder, an ethical designer-maker based in Leicester feels that the available options need much wider promotion to all, regardless of age and generation, and that people aren't generally aware of the impacts of conventional gold – and herein lies the main issue. She believes we need to see large commercial boost in this area of the industry to boost the growing momentum and equal

the interest that she sees in the movement. "My ethos," she says, "is to try and raise awareness of how jewellery can have detrimental effects on those involved in the extraction of its raw materials.

"It's important to both use and promote the value of ethically sourced materials for jewellery – something that not all are aware of. My aim is to make jewellery 'responsible' and fair. The more power behind this the better. If the differences aren't highlighted then consumers may remain unaware of alternatives – whether that be recycled, eco, Fairtrade, or regular metal." She urges other jewellers and retailers to "tell customers about the Fairtrade option". "I don't see it weakens your standard-metal offer, it just gives choice," she adds.

This year, events will continue across England Scotland and Wales to raise awareness of Fairtrade Gold with the public. With support from Fairtrade's network of over 600 Fairtrade Towns, 1,350 schools and 170 universities, and 7,500 places of worship, Fairtrade's 'I Do' gold campaign aims to generate \$1m in Fairtrade premium for disadvantaged mining communities around the world. This campaign encourages brides and grooms in the UK to buy Fairtrade gold rings ahead of Valentine's Day.

Fairtrade supporters will host photographic exhibitions of stunning images from the mines to illustrate the need for Fairtrade and benefits to miners. They hope the exhibitions will also provide a platform for jewellers to showcase their Fairtrade Gold jewellery.

Furthermore, coinciding with Fairtrade Fortnight running from Monday 27 February - Sunday 12 March, the first Fairtrade Design Awards for emerging designers are launched.

Ingle & Rhode are inviting UK-based jewellery students,

apprentices, post graduates, and those at the start of their jewellery careers, to register by 12 February to apply for the awards and submit a design for a wedding ring, an engagement ring or a wedding and engagement ring set. Co-founder and director of the company, Tim Ingle, says: "The aim of the awards is to both showcase the talents of emerging jewellery designers, while raising awareness of Fairtrade gold amongst the people who are the future of our industry.

"We're really excited by the level of interest the awards are attracting, it goes to show how the importance of ethical sourcing is becoming increasingly accepted." A shortlist of up to 20 finalists will be put to a public vote, with the winners announced in April. Prizes include £500, work experience and the chance to have winning designs made in Fairtrade gold.

Another topical event is to run this February, as the University of Dundee hosts a Symposium on Ethical Making aimed primarily at jewellers and silversmiths who have an interest in adopting an ethical approach in their practice. Both Greg Valerio MBE and Tim Ingle will sit on the panel along with silversmith Karen Westland, jeweller Ute Decker, researcher Dr Peter Oakley and jeweller and ethical consultant Vivien Johnston.

In an interview with Jewellery Focus in April 2016 Greg Valerio spoke of his aim of "doing a luxury jewellery launch at some point this year, hopefully in North America." This goal is underway - in autumn he was made ambassador for Reflective Images, who are the only exclusively Fairtrade Gold jeweller in the USA. President Marc Choyt supports the launch of Fairtrade Gold in the US market as their commercial liaison, providing critical contacts that will lay the groundwork for more jewellers to enter the system.

Mainstream usage is still far

“**Ethically minded millennials, otherwise known as Generation Y, are the largest generation in Western history. Reports have revealed them to be most concerned with ethical brand values...**”



Above, left to right:

Ana-Maria Rubiano Prieto (Fairtrade Foundation Product Integrity Officer), Dave Merry (Goldsmiths' Company Assay Office's Head of Training, Education & Trading Standards Liaison), Dan Odida (General Secretary, Micodepro), Toby Rule (Fairtrade Foundation, Licensing and Customer Services Officer) Victoria Waugh in the laboratory at the Goldsmiths' Company Assay Office in Autumn 2016

away there, but it's their goal. Valerio said then: "The UK market is the ethical jewellery market of the world. In my opinion, we have the best ethical performance in the world, particularly around those foundational principles of transparency and traceability." Needless to say, the clout of America recognising and promoting the campaign would certainly make a large difference.

A second African mining co-operative is seeking Fairtrade certification which would come into effect this year and would widen the Fairtrade network again this year. Dan Omondi Odida, general secretary of Micodepro Development Group, Kenya, visited the UK in September 2016. He met businesses and campaigners all over the UK to raise awareness of how gold is mined and encourage people to buy Fairtrade gold.

He visited the Goldsmiths Company Assay Office to learn more about the UK jewellery sector and hallmarking requirements and was curious to learn about the alloy mixes which create differing carats and colours. He also went onto The Rock Hound studio in East London, and saw how the workshop receives its Fairtrade Gold, and examined their pieces struck with the Fairtrade mark.

Omondi Odida spoke at the Scottish Fair Trade Campaigner Conference which Martin Rhodes, director of the Scottish Fair Trade Forum, described crucially as "our most international Fairtrade conference to date".

Odida could explain first-hand that millions of men and women in his home country mine by hand the seams of gold around Lake Victoria informally at best, illegally at worst. Many are indebted to middlemen and the gold they sell often trades dramatically below the global price.

Through Fairtrade, Odida's co-operative has been trained in health and safety, how to use mercury safely, and business skills. One of the ambitions of his co-operative, once they achieve Fairtrade certification, is to be able to produce their gold without the use of mercury. Tragically, the toxic chemical has caused serious long-term health conditions and even death in men, women and children in the area. His group also wants to invest in primary education and healthcare and to support local orphans whose parents died following mining accidents or illness.

It is of interest that the conference took place in Scotland, as it is a Fairtrade nation – one of only two in the world (the other

being Wales). This means they have committed to promoting Fairtrade and must pledge to achieve certain targets and meet various criteria. Need we see this level of support before ethically produced metal is a staple in the trade? Are larger companies' pledges to increase their use of ethically sourced gold enough?

Another new year motto rings true here for Victoria Waugh, gold product manager at the Fairtrade Foundation: "There is so much truth in the phrase 'small changes add up to huge results'. Consumers are increasingly taking notice of the impact of their buying habits, and are starting to recognise they are accountable for their purchases. As we continue to highlight the need for Fairtrade, we will see demand from these consumers grow. It's a great time for jewellers to embrace Fairtrade Gold into their businesses. We encourage jewellers to make it their new year's resolution." JF

MORE INFORMATION

A new online service will be launched by the Fairtrade Foundation this spring. The e-learning platform, designed with support from the National Association of Jewellers (NAJ), the Company of Master Jewellers and the Goldsmiths' Company Assay Office, will help retail sales staff to sell Fairtrade Gold and boost jewellery sales. Fairtrade Gold is already used by over 250 businesses in the UK including online retailer Argos, fine jewellery brand Clogau Gold, luxury bespoke jeweller Harriet Kelsall and pioneer ethical jeweller CRED. If you would like to use Fairtrade Gold in your business visit fairtrade.org.uk/goldbusiness for more information.