
Opal essence



Opals may be Australia's national gemstone but recent decades have seen their discreet charms turned into tourist baubles. Enter Genevieve Lilley, an architect who has returned to her native Australia following a successful career in London with multi-award-winning architect David Chipperfield. With husband Kingsley Wallman, scion of an Australian opal mining family, Lilley has set up Venerari, a jewellery store in Sydney's Strand Arcade that aims to put the

oomph back into the opal – and other stones too.

"The opal had bottomed out as the most disgusting jewellery," she observes. "The industry has followed the tourist market down."

Lilley admits she never understood opals before plunging in with her own designs. "There are often far too many colours for me [in each stone] and there are still a lot I don't like. I tend to pick stones with one or two colours that work together. I often pair different types of

opal – which is a heinous crime apparently."

Lilley's architectural training means that she has brought a modernity to her settings, such as the rectilinear opal design (*left*) and quartz ring (*right*) that eschews the fussy: "I'm interested in the relationship of patterns and shapes. I'm rough on jewellery myself," she says, "and I design for people who wear it gardening."

Her colourful pieces (white diamonds bore her but black diamonds and black gold feature) and

her unique way with opals is proving popular with overseas visitors as well as locals.

The important thing for Lilley is to design what she likes herself – although she has now put aside her antipathy and succumbed to the demand for white diamond engagement and wedding rings.

And when she's not rescuing the opal from ignominy, she is still designing buildings.

