

VIRTUOSO

THE MAGAZINE



THE
STYLE &
DESIGN
ISSUE

“Which city do you love for shopping?”



Photographer
Anand Gogoi
New Delhi
Cover and “Shine On,” page 70

“I’m not much of a shopper, but the one place I enjoy browsing is Bangkok. There’s something interesting around every corner, and I can never be sure what I’ll end up buying, from little trinkets to film cameras and rolls of 120 Kodak film.”

THE REPORT: “The City Palace left me awestruck during our cover shoot, with the early-morning light casting a soft glow. Rambagh Palace was equally enchanting; peacocks wandered the lawns as guests looked on over breakfast.”

@ anand.gogoi



Photographer
Ben Weller
Fujisawa, Japan
“Listen Up,” page 65

“Tokyo, of course! There’s always something to do, whether it’s buying high-end goods in Ginza, hunting used-camera deals in Shinjuku, or just people-watching in trendy Harajuku.”

THE REPORT: “There was one listening bar I wanted to shoot, but the proprietor didn’t allow photography. I stayed anyway, sipping a soda and listening to Led Zeppelin on vinyl. Sure, I didn’t get any pictures, but the point of these places is to leave your worries outside and lose yourself in the music.”

@ culturechromatic



Writer
Mary Gray
Florence
“Master Class,” page 94

“I love London – I can easily spend a full day between Hatchards bookshop and Fortnum & Mason. For secondhand scores, Florence and Rome are tough to beat.”

THE REPORT: “One of my stops at Female Arts in Florence coincided with Halloween, which isn’t an Italian tradition but has gained traction in recent years. Founder Giulia and I saw more than a few witches, princesses, and ghosts tap at the window during our chat.”

@ verymarygray



Writer
Sarah Khan
New York City
“Shine On,” page 70

“Kigali was a revelation – my suitcase was straining on the way back from Rwanda with chic dresses from Moshions and Rwanda Clothing, housewares from Haute Baso, coffee from Kivu Noir, and more.”

THE REPORT: “I wasn’t familiar with the jewelry brand Gyan Jaipur before my trip, but thankfully, Shanti Kohli of Amber Tours arranged a visit to its flagship for me. The entire experience – the beautiful jewelry, the well-designed factory, the ultra-contemporary museum showcasing artifacts from the founder’s travels, and the art-filled private dining room where I enjoyed a home-cooked meal – took my breath away.”

@ bysarahkhan





Jaipur

Vintage style in the
Pink City.

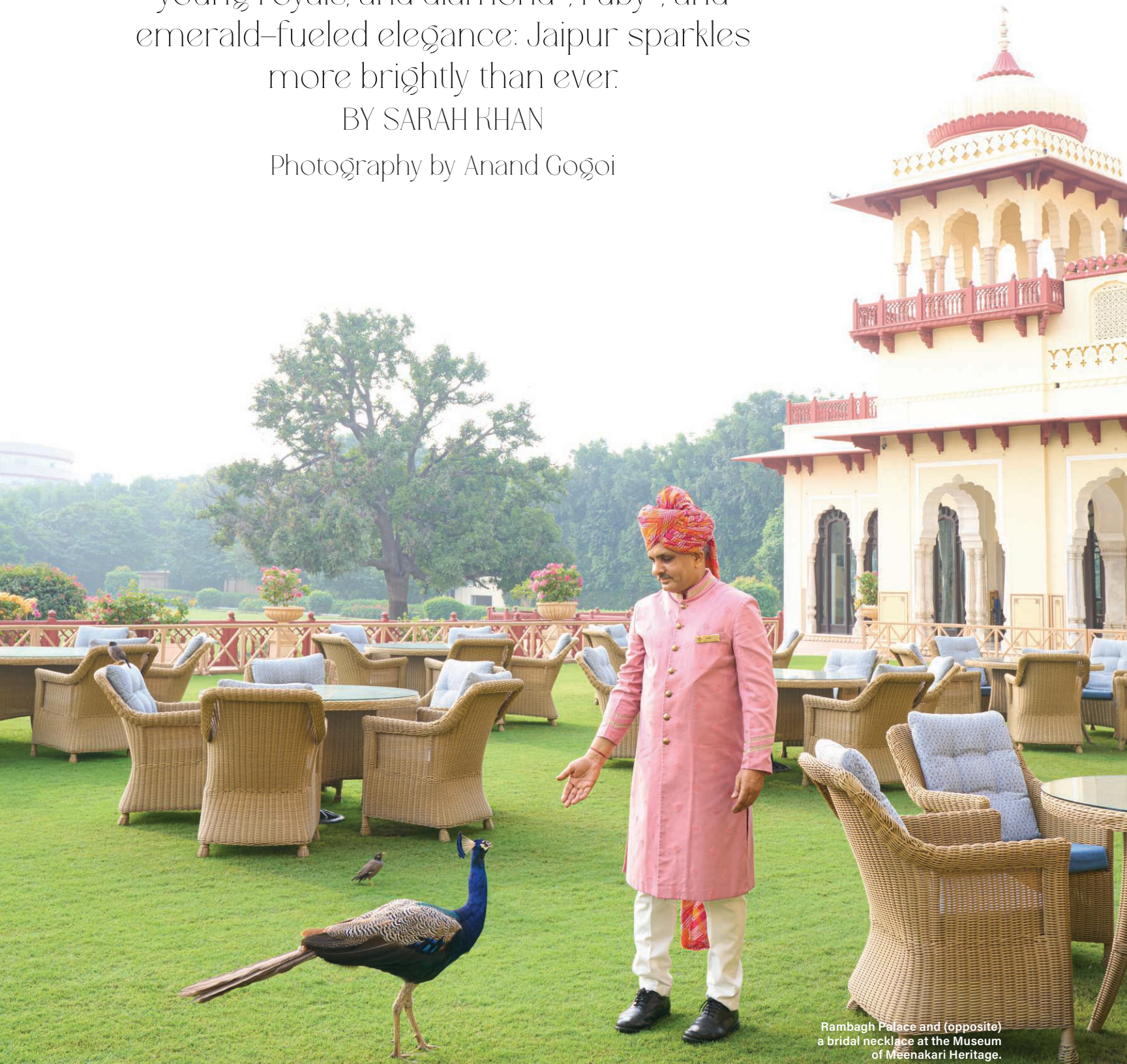
Shine On



Ninth-generation jewelers,
young royals, and diamond-, ruby-, and
emerald-fueled elegance: Jaipur sparkles
more brightly than ever.

BY SARAH KHAN

Photography by Anand Gogoi



Rambagh Palace and (opposite)
a bridal necklace at the Museum
of Meenakari Heritage.

The Gem Palace and (opposite, clockwise from top left) owners Samarth, Sarthak, Samir, and Siddharth Kasliwal.





TRYING TO HAVE a conversation with Siddharth and Samarth Kasliwal is tricky, because they keep interrupting to drape me in jewels.

I've barely settled into a hot-pink divan at their showroom when a choker with diamonds, emeralds, and a curtain of pearls is clasped around my neck. Before I can object – not that I would – a second necklace appears, this one a web of diamond strands supporting a baseball-size pendant that cascades toward my lap. Then Samarth insists the conversation cannot go any further until a belt has been procured to match, a golden sash with clusters of rose-cut diamonds, the largest encircling a 170-carat Colombian emerald.

Now he's really in his element, a sorcerer of sparkle conjuring stones from thin air: An oversize ring with a fringe of swaying diamonds and an ornate *maang tikka*, or headpiece, materialize on my finger and forehead. Later, he loses his train of thought midsentence, and suddenly a serpent encrusted with 2,000 diamonds is slithering up my wrist. By this point, I'm trying not to buckle under the weight of a million dollars of heirloom bling.

To be fair, it's easy to get distracted at Jaipur's storied Gem Palace. As ninth-generation jewelers carrying forth a glittering legacy, brothers Siddharth, 40, and Samarth, 31, and their cousins, Samir, 40, and Sarthak, 29, are known to

punctuate sentences by flinging open cases of blindingly bright necklaces, sapphire-encrusted perfume bottles, and whimsical rings modeled after peacocks and koalas. The atelier is the Kasliwals' candy factory, where confections are crafted from carats and karats.

"We sometimes joke that we have rubies running through our veins," says Samarth. Right now, they're spilling over my fingers as I inspect a scarlet sheath embellished with roughly 3,000 of them, concealing a 120-year-old blade.

"It's an experience," Shanti Kohli of Amber Tours, who arranged my jewelry spree, says later. "I tell my clients, 'Don't worry about buying anything. Spend an hour or two and be covered by diamonds.' There's something quite special about that."

I've been to Jaipur many times – in fact, this is my second visit to the rose-colored seat of the Kasliwal family dynasty – but on this trip I realize there's a special alchemy at play in the Pink City right now. As the next generation of Jaipur's jewelers grapples with balancing the history and future of their family heritage, the city's young royals have also come of age. The dashing Maharaja Sawai Padmanabh Singh, 26 – fondly known as Pacho – and his glamorous 25-year-old sister, Princess Gauravi Kumari, are the consummate Gen Z patrons, infusing youthful flair into the eighteenth-century City Palace, their



royal residence that's also home to a sprawling museum. Last spring, the princess opened The Palace Atelier, a jewel-box of a concept store that turns any notions I have of a conventional museum shop on its head, filling it with baubles from Gem Palace, Tallin, and Adi Handmade alongside chic jumpsuits by Lovebirds and Banarasi saris from Anita Dongre. In November and December, the maharaja unveiled two more new spaces at the palace, the Jaipur Centre for Art and The Sarvato, a tasting-menu restaurant and cocktail bar.

"It's a great time to be in Jaipur," Singh says, musing on these cutting-edge projects. "With a confluence of creative forces coming together, there are so many wonderful initiatives across Jaipur's cultural landscape."

As a testament to the siblings' remarkable convening power, the Diwali parties and fashion shows they host are coveted invitations for locals and visitors alike. "They truly are people who appreciate and understand beauty and creativity," says Samarth. "When they have parties, people from all over the world come – they're making Jaipur a melting pot."

IT TURNS OUT, the young royals' cosmopolitan vision for Jaipur is entrenched in their inheritance. When the

city's founder, Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, established Rajasthan's capital here in 1727, he envisioned it as much more than a seat of political power: He dreamed of an artisanal epicenter luring jewelers, weavers, painters, and other craftspeople from across the Mughal Empire – the Kasliwals' forebears in Agra among them. Three centuries later, his dream endures.

In the markets of the Old City, lacquer bangles are melted and fashioned into spangled cuffs on Maniharon ka Rasta (Bangle Makers' Lane). Thatheron ka Rasta (Utensil Makers' Lane) still echoes with the *tat-tat-tat* of pots being hammered from copper and brass. Most famous of all is Johari Bazaar, the jewelers' market, which grew into the world's most important emerald-cutting center as raw stones from Colombia, Brazil, Afghanistan, and Zambia passed through its time-worn alleys. "The story of Jaipur is eternal, and we are committed to bringing it to as many people as we can," Princess Kumari says.

"This is a street where jewelry has been made for 300 years. I feel it," says Akshat Ghiya when I meet him at his studio in the heart of Johari Bazaar. "There's something to be said about energy, right? When I walk in the Old City, when I hear the sounds, when I go up to the terrace for my chai – every day, I feel really connected to what I'm doing."



Aditi and Akshat Ghiya, the sister and brother behind Adi Handmade and Tallin. Opposite: A Jaipur flower market.



Clockwise from top left: Princess Gauravi Kumari at her Palace Atelier, Amrapali earrings, Palace Atelier's bold look, and Gyan's Arun Dhadha at his boutique.





Clockwise from top left: Amrapali's Tarang Arora and blossom necklace, and Digvijay Singh Shekhawat and a necklace at the Museum of Meenakari Heritage.





KHĀSA POL
खासा पोल



Against this distinguished backdrop, the 42-year-old designer reimagines contemporary Indian jewelry with his brand, Tallin, whose pieces marry Indian and Italian sensibilities (during his childhood, the family split their time between Jaipur and Padua). While there are plenty of diamonds, sapphires, and rubies in the necklaces and rings I try on, I also spy watermelon tourmalines, gray moonstones, and fire opals, unusual in Jaipur's traditional jewelry landscape. Tallin's versatile pieces are wearable at Mumbai weddings and Manhattan galas alike.

Akshat shares his humming workshop with his sister, Aditi, 36, who has her own ideas about how to advance India's centuries-old artisanal traditions. In her Adi Handmade line, she embellishes delicate gold rings and minimalist chains meant for everyday wear with *polki* (uncut) diamonds and pink sapphires to complement her thicker and more ornate rings, bracelets, and earrings. Raised by their gem-trading father and jewelry-designer mother and later educated in Switzerland and the U.S., each sibling found their own path back to Johari Bazaar.

"I tried really hard to not make jewelry," says Aditi. But her destiny was set in stones: "I've been going to jewelry shows since I was 6 months old – it's kind of a part of me." It's hard not to get seduced by the trade in Jaipur; there's a reason that creatives from all over the world come here to learn from master *karigars* (artisans). "Jaipur is just really good for creating things," Aditi explains. "You can go into the little lanes of the Old City and have some weird idea and say, 'I want to make this.'" And so she does.

JEWELRY ISN'T so much an accessory as a way of life in India; seemingly everyone – from maharajas to women selling baskets of tomatoes on the side of the road – is adorned, if not with extravagant turban pins and belts, then at least with stacks of mirrored bangles or twinkling nose rings. My own affinity for *chamak-chamak* (shiny) things often led me to trail my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother on jewelry-shopping expeditions in Hyderabad's Old City as a child. We'd sit on rugs on the floor of a glittering mansion as elaborate pieces were presented alongside cups of *adrak* chai and spellbinding tales – a 10-carat emerald my mother bought, our jeweler once recounted, had originally been commissioned by a rani inspired by a piece she'd glimpsed in a portrait of Queen Victoria. I'd curl up in my mother's lap and doze off as she inspected Basra pearls one by one.

Today in Jaipur, similar scenes still play out. Just as our family jeweler's great-grandfather plied my own great-grandmother with *karanphool* earrings and *satlara* necklaces a century ago in Hyderabad, "We still have people saying, 'My grandmother was buying from your grandfather, and now I'm buying from you,'" Siddharth says. But with younger scions now ascending to Jaipur's throne and helming these illustrious family businesses, there's a

"The idea is not to sell jewelry – the idea is to sell the dream to come to Jaipur, stay in a palace, go and eat *laal maas* somewhere."

thrilling sense of evolution and momentum afoot. Age-old handcrafting techniques are more endangered than ever, but creative new efforts aim to protect and celebrate Jaipur's jewelry-making tradition.

For the Kasliwals, staying true to their ancestors' aesthetics is paramount, but they do it in their fuchsia fever dream of an emporium that puts a bold, fresh spin on traditional Rajasthani arches, frescoes, *jali* pierced screens, and mud-house motifs. Akshat, meanwhile, is busy reimagining his centuries-old family *haveli* in the Johari Bazaar into a stylish showroom for Tallin. Opening later this year, it will be a place for visitors to try on his art deco pieces (among other collections) and soak in views of the Aravalli Mountains from the roof with a perfectly made cappuccino in hand.

Other jewelry houses have lately been opening private museums as a means to preserve and champion these crafts, and Amber Tours sets me up with introductions, exclusive private visits, and intimate experiences that give me a window into the work these family institutions are doing. Amrapali, perhaps India's most ubiquitous jewelry brand, opened one in 2018 to showcase tribal pieces collected by founders Rajiv Arora and Rajesh Ajmera on their travels across the country; Arora's son, Tarang, 41, now CEO and creative director, is busy adding a new floor, complete with an events space, to host clients for experiential dinners. At Gyan Jaipur, which also retails at New York's Bergdorf Goodman, managing

Priyal Dhadha's garments are designed with threads of silver and gemstones.



director Arun Dhadha dreamed up a beautifully curated, ultra-contemporary space to display his late father's expansive collection of Rajasthani textiles and fans, Kashmiri shawls, antique silver hookah mouthpieces, and, of course, jewelry. There's also a concept shop stocked with blouses and vests from his daughter Priyal's fashion line, Hemji, woven with threads of pure silver and stones such as blue topaz and quartz. Afterward, Dhadha guides me into a tranquil dining room where he serves visitors home-cooked Rajasthani *thalis*.

I've always been awed by how the humblest quotidian objects are elevated to treasures in India, in the form of bejeweled perfume vials, trinket boxes, chess pieces, kohl jars, and more. But even the keenest-eyed enthusiasts might fail to notice that the backs of necklaces and bracelets are also often lavishly adorned, with a delicate enamelwork technique called *meenakari*. "The front, everyone sees – the back of

the piece is touching your body," explains Sunita Shekhawat, one of the few women behind a leading jewelry brand. "It's a moment of private joy, something that only you can see, something that only you can experience."

Shekhawat decided to draw more attention to it and worked with her artisans to re-create intricately enameled pieces from collections around the world. Last spring, she unveiled the Museum of Meenakari Heritage, a pink sandstone structure above her eponymous showroom that recounts the history of this fine work. Now her son Digvijay, 31, is introducing a *meenakari* workshop for curious travelers, inspired by a watchmaking class he observed in Switzerland. "This is ten times more difficult, and we should show that to people so they can value it," he says.

As I swirl through the city's jewelry families, I keep waiting to hear gossipy whispers or mur-

murs of generations-old rivalries, but instead, as they chatter about lunch at someone's farmhouse or a hangout at the palace later, I'm struck by how much they all seem to genuinely like each other. "There's a lot of brotherhood," says Ghiya. "We're all telling the same story through our work – whether it's Tarang or Sid or me, we all want to carve our identity. We're lovers and admirers and respecters of design and precious stones."

While they each have their own visual vocabulary, together the Kasliwals, Ghiyas, Aroras, Dhadhas, and Shekhawats are part of Jaipur's glittering mosaic, with plenty of space for everyone to sparkle. "The idea is not to sell jewelry; the idea is to sell the dream to come to Jaipur, stay in a palace, go and eat *laal maas* somewhere – to sell Jaipur and take Jaipur to the world," says Tarang. Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II would be proud.



Rambagh Palace.

Bring on the Bling

GO Virtuoso on-site connection **Amber Tours** works with travel advisors to craft exclusive itineraries throughout India, Bhutan, and Tibet that stand out for their invitations into private homes and palaces and meetings with artists, jewelers, designers, chefs, and more. For example, a three-day stay in Jaipur could include private appointments with the jewelers mentioned in this story, as well as a guided walk through Johari Bazaar, yoga or a predawn hike to catch the Pink City sunrise (followed by breakfast with elephants on a private farm), and a tour of The City Palace,

with access to areas off-limits to the public. *Departures: Any day through 2025.*

STAY The newest hotel on the Jaipur block, the opulent 50-room **Raffles Jaipur** is a modern-day palace inspired by the *zenanas*, or women's wings, of erstwhile royal family homes. Age-old design techniques evoke a historic feel in sandstone walls, mosaic *tikri* work, and mango-wood furniture with delicate bone inlay.

One of India's most beloved hotels for visitors and locals alike, **Rambagh Palace** is the former estate of Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II and his fashion-icon consort, Maharani Gayatri Devi.

Even if you're not checking into one of its 78 historic rooms brimming with antiques and paintings, no visit to Jaipur is complete without a drink in the Polo Bar or afternoon tea at the Verandah Café (just stay alert for sashaying peacocks vying for your pastries). *Virtuoso travelers receive breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*

It may have opened in 2021, but **The Leela Palace Jaipur's** grandeur belies its young age; the 200-room spread in the foothills of the Aravalli Mountains has a regal aura courtesy of spacious terraces, a wealth of marble sculptures, and a standout restaurant, Mohan Mahal, immaculately clad in a mosaic of mirrors. *Virtuoso travelers receive breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*

Everyone from Madonna to Bill Clinton has bedded down at **The Oberoi Rajvillas, Jaipur**, an idyllic retreat modeled after a sandstone fortress. The 32-acre resort is filled with landscaped gardens and 71 rooms and luxe tents, built around an eighteenth-century temple. *Virtuoso travelers receive breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*

SHOP Amrapali Museum's beautiful space celebrates tribal jewelry from all corners of India; many of its pieces have inspired collections at Amrapali Jaipur, one of India's most recognized jewelry brands.

The city's best-known jewelry store, **Gem Palace**, has been a fixture since 1852, and its pink, eminently Instagrammable private showroom makes a bold, contemporary backdrop to appreciate generations of craftsmanship.

Over his lifetime, jeweler Gyan Chand Ji Dhadha amassed a collection of global objets d'art spanning 3,000 years. His family pays tribute to his legacy at the stunning, private **Gyan Museum**, in a futuristic space designed by French architect Paul Mathieu.

Jaipur has become an important center for *meenakari* enamelwork that delicately adorns the backs of opulent jewelry pieces with precious stones and intricate motifs. Jewelry maven Sunita Shekhawat opened the **Museum of Meenakari Heritage** – her ode to the craft – last year in a striking sandstone building that also houses her showroom.

You could do some serious damage to your budget at The City Palace's new **Palace Atelier**, snapping up fine jewelry and ceramics from some of India's top fashion and design houses, but at the very least you'll want to pick up a colorful tote bag or a pack of Jaipur stamp stickers as a memento. 📍