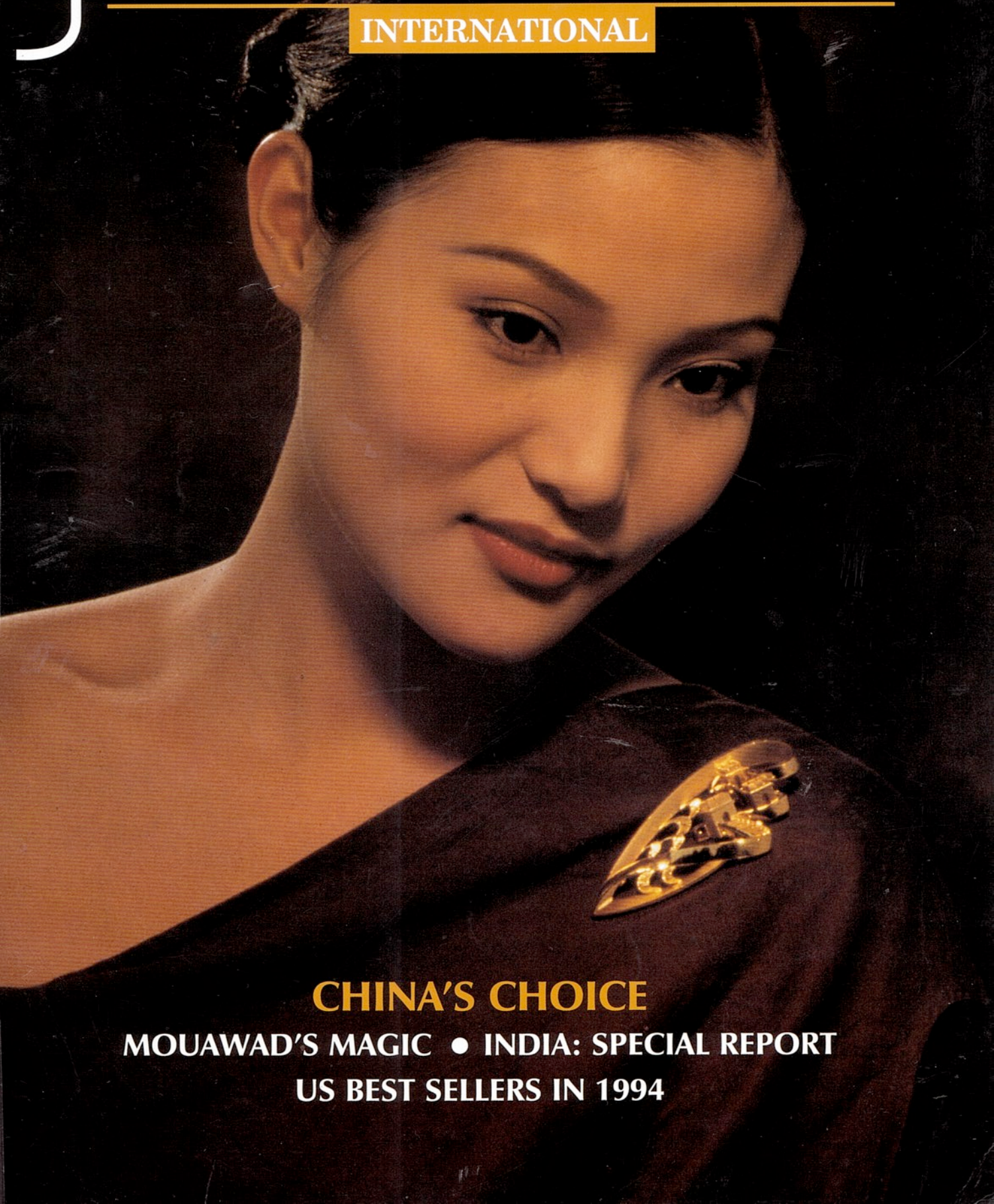


FEBRUARY/MARCH 1995

JEWELLERY

INTERNATIONAL



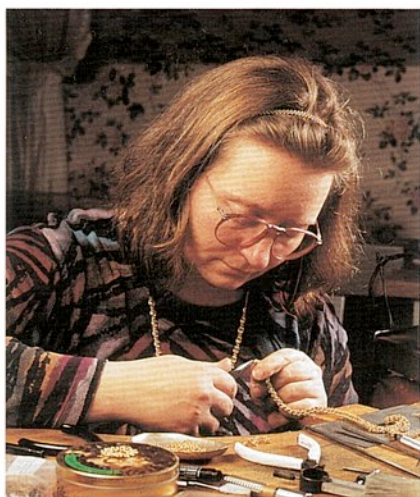
CHINA'S CHOICE

MOUAWAD'S MAGIC • INDIA: SPECIAL REPORT

US BEST SELLERS IN 1994

THE GOLD WEAVER

The success of Lucie Heskett's complex, handcrafted gold chains reflects a return to traditional values and the appreciation of the skills of artists and artisans.



The worlds of jewellery and watches, accessories and luxury goods, are witnessing a very definite return to traditional values. There is a move towards an appreciation of skilled craftsmanship and of the individual artist, designer or artisan behind it. Now, even gold chain, a field dominated for decades by technology and the brilliant machine-made marvels from Italy and Germany, is being challenged by painstaking handiwork that takes the ancient craft back to its origins.

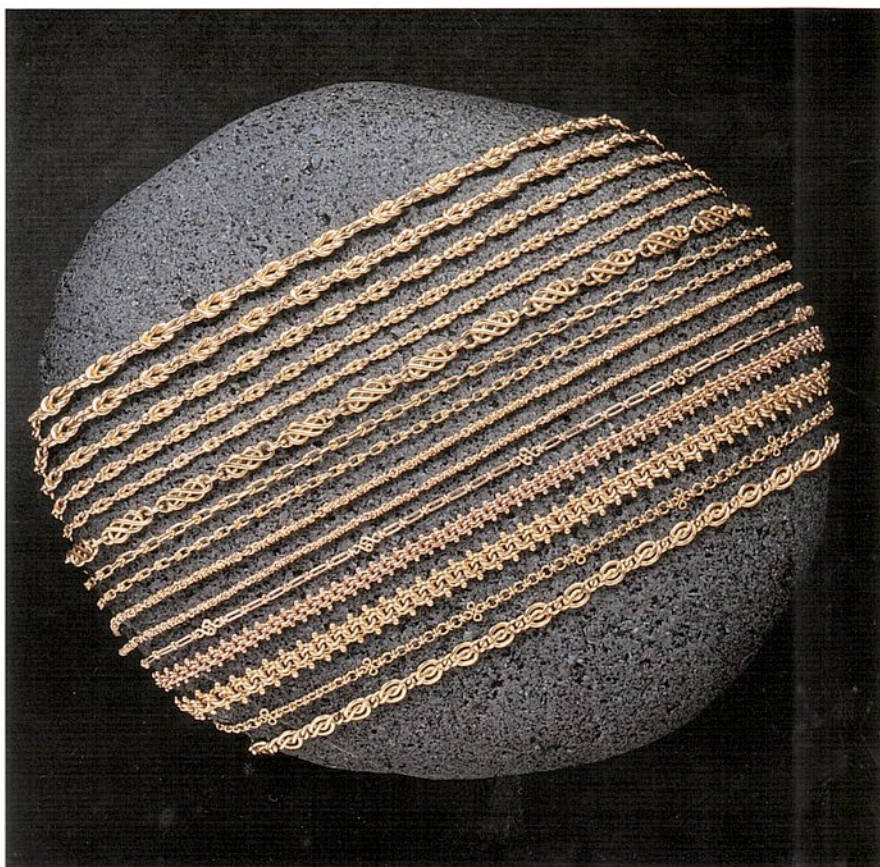
Swiss craftswoman Lucie Heskett is called a gold weaver. In her small

workshop overlooking Lake Lucerne, she is reviving a virtually lost art. She spends hours, days, making each complex gold chain entirely by hand, from gold bar to finished product. Although her chains are based on antique models and traditional patterns, they are modern interpretations of well-loved classics, rather than reproductions.

Ms Heskett's work began as a hobby, although dedicated craftsmanship is in her blood. Her father is a sculptor, her brother a photographer and her mother began to make silver jewellery towards the end of her life. Ms Heskett herself first started work as a secretary, then tried all sorts of jobs from truck driving to copy writing. In 1985 she married an English gardener and together they went to live in Lucerne, her original home town.

Once settled, she enrolled in evening classes for goldsmithing and, as her hobby developed into an all-absorbing fascination, Ms Heskett decided to embark on a four-year apprenticeship to a Lucerne goldsmith. When she finished in 1992, she set up her own workshop at home and dedicated herself to the area of goldwork that had most captivated her during her studies - chain making. As she explains, during her evening classes in jewellery making, she made yards and yards of chain in her attempts to master the art of soldering.

In 1993 she held her first exhibition in Lucerne, showing six chains and four bracelets. The response was encouraging and later that year,



Photos: Louis Brem.

Top: Lucie Heskett in her Geneva workshop.
Left: A selection of her handmade chains.



The Golden Serpent.

having worked day and night to produce 29 exhibits, she joined in a family exhibition with her father and brother. This time the success of her work took her by surprise. She was inundated with orders and in January 1994 she took on an assistant.

Last year she held her first exhibition outside Switzerland – at Bentley's, antique jewellers in London's Bond Street. Once again the intricacy and flexibility of her chains astonished an educated, discerning clientele accustomed to exquisite workmanship.

Ms Heskett works in 20kt gold because, she says, the feel and flexibility of the chains are as important as their look, and she likes the luxurious, heavy richness of this quality of gold and its soft malleability. She also uses coloured gold, a particularly rich, antique golden yellow, as well as rose and red gold (beloved of the Victorians), to add yet more warmth, character and richness.

She is always looking for old chains and new ideas, searching in books, museums and antique markets, even scanning historical films and costume dramas. Once she sees a chain that she likes, she makes 12 or more different studies in silver until she finds the best

rendition, with the best proportions. She casts her own pencil-thick bars of gold, then mills and draws the wire. From this, she carefully forms the links, one by one, before joining them together so that each moves freely and easily. Each inch of chain takes between 45 minutes and two and a half hours to make.

There are now some 20 different patterns in her repertoire. Regatta, spaced with reef or love knots, was the first she ever made. Troubadour, one of the most intricate, has slanting double circle links and is her best-selling chain. Celtic incorporates an interlacing motif; Crusade is reminiscent of medieval chain; Serenade, with its lyrical flow of entwined hoops, is the chain that Ms Heskett herself wears all the time.

The most ambitious example to date has been the spectacular Gold Serpent chain, 161cms long, using some 0.34kg of gold, and taking two months to make. It is a close-knit, three-dimensional chain, based on a foxtail pattern but breathtakingly tactile and fluid. The Serpent has now been updated to look and feel even more like the slinky scales of a snake, formed like chain-mail, edged with a spine of gold beads and reminiscent of Victorian serpent necklaces and bracelets.

For Ms Heskett, the chain has always had a special meaning. She loves the meditative repetition of the links, their movement and "playfulness", as she calls it, as well as the associations of the chain throughout the long history of jewellery. The chain is one of the earliest, most basic and universal forms of jewellery and one that has often served as currency, as a symbol of power, status and high office.

In the Renaissance, gold chains were often presented as princely gifts which could, if necessary, be converted into ready cash. As a fashion item, the chain has almost never been completely out of vogue, enjoying particular popularity in the 1820s and

30s, when it was worn long, often hung with a muff, watch or other personal item.

In the 1920s the long chain, along with a string of beads, became one of the most chic accessories, when it was also joined by the fashionable pearl or gem-set *sautoir*. Gold and gilt chains, worn *en masse*, were high fashion symbols of the 1960s and 70s, and nostalgia for that period has seen them re-emerging over the past two years as an important, fluid accessory to the new, deconstructed fashions.

Ms Heskett is interested in the "language" of the links: knots, twists, circles and intertwined loops are all symbols of eternity and everlasting love, while the chain itself has a quality of endlessness that fascinates her. The patterns of links give each chain its own strong personality, with which she is clearly very much in tune. She enjoys the therapeutic process of making one link after another. "It is like a trance," she says. "On good days, it is a pleasure to watch my fingers working in perfect co-ordination, so automatically that I can sometimes let my thoughts roam freely, leaving my hands to do the work."

Her customers, she says, generally prefer an understated style in their clothes and accessories, searching for character, quality and individuality. They like to have "personal rapport" with their possessions and often with the person who made them. They appreciate the easy wearability of chains, the fact that they can be worn from day to evening, with jeans and a sweater or with a formal suit.

Ms Heskett's handmade gold chains are sold privately, or through retail exhibitions in various cities of Switzerland, as well as Bentley's in London. For the future, she says, she is dreaming of the major fashion capitals of the world, but insists she will keep the business small and exclusive and never turn it into a "factory". □