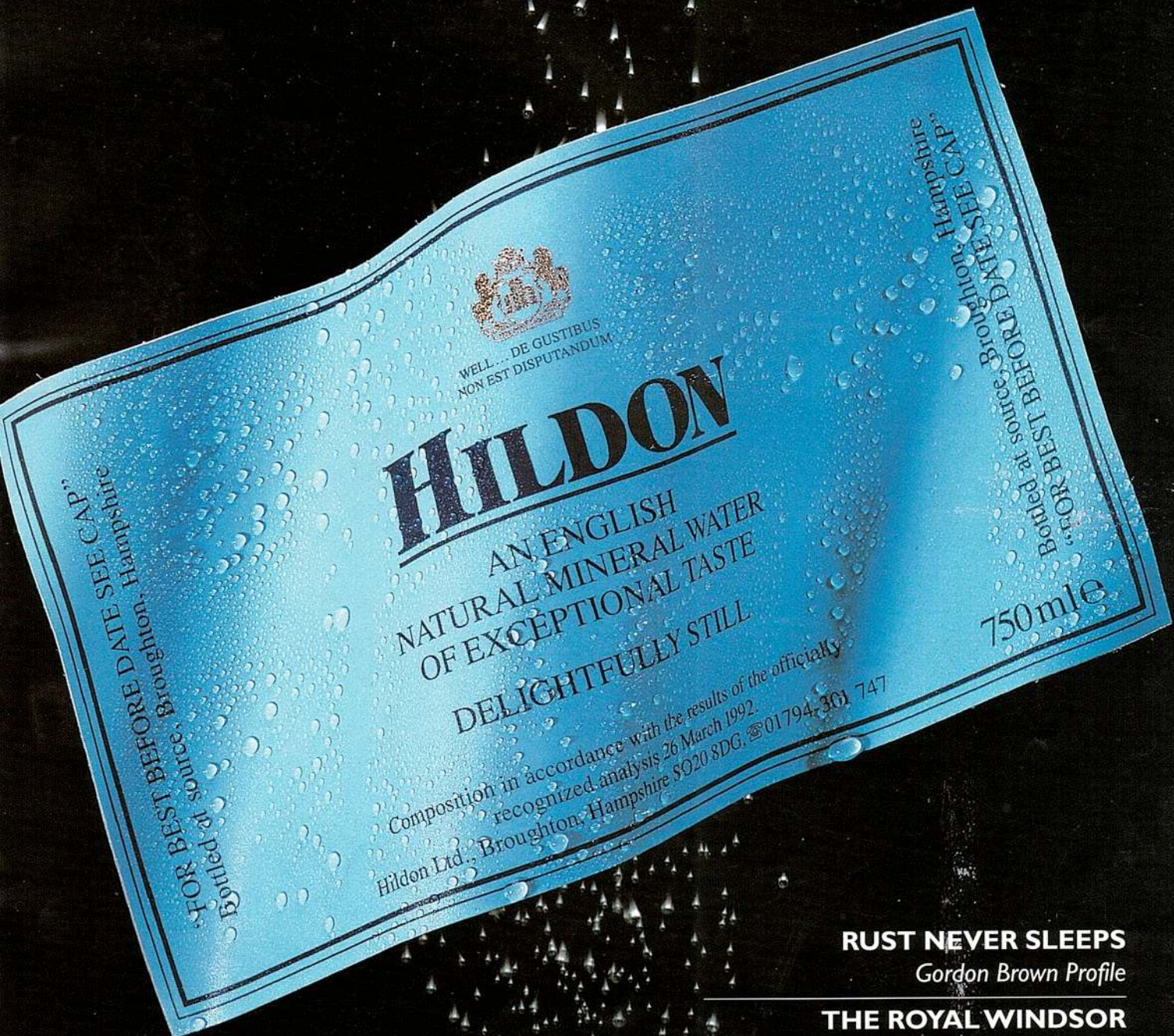


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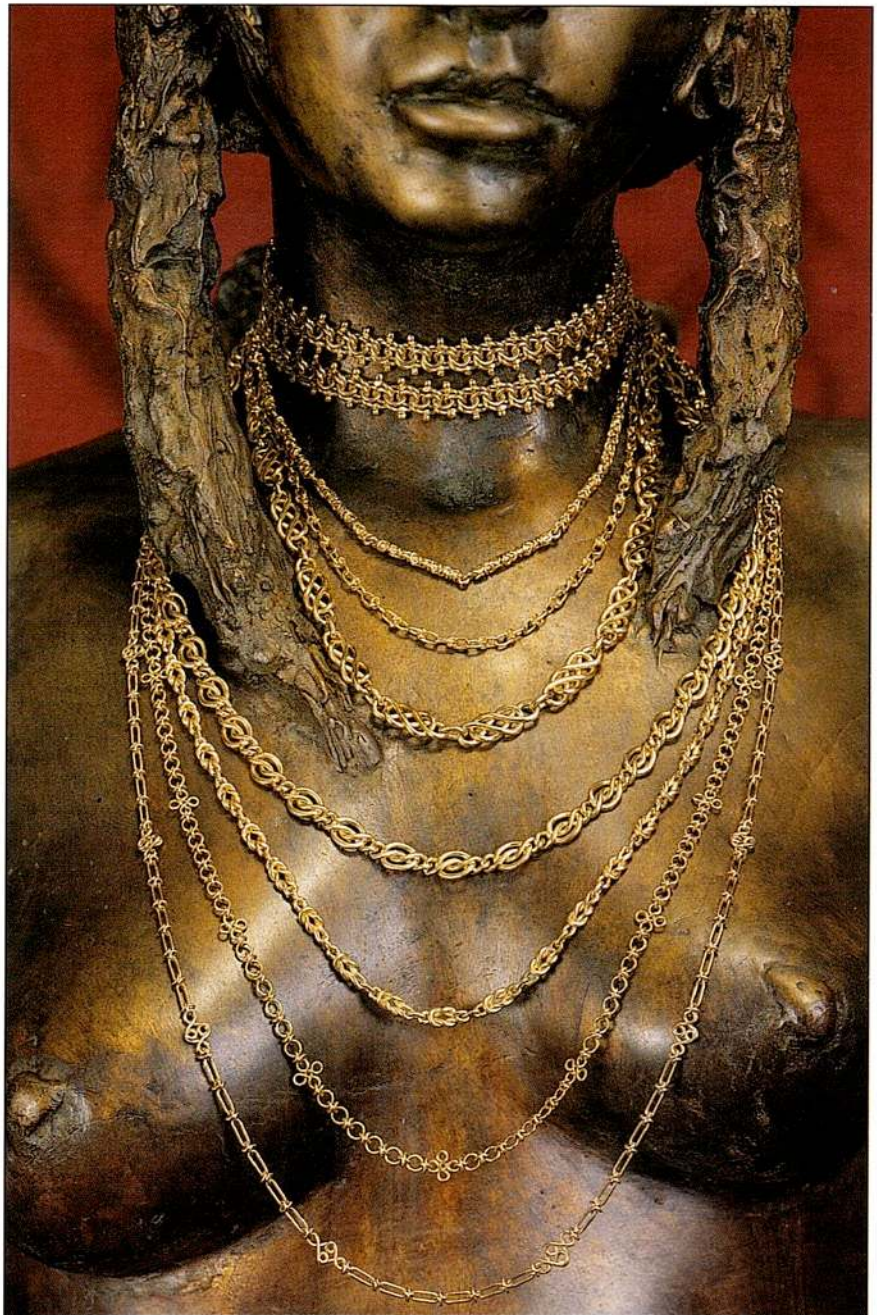
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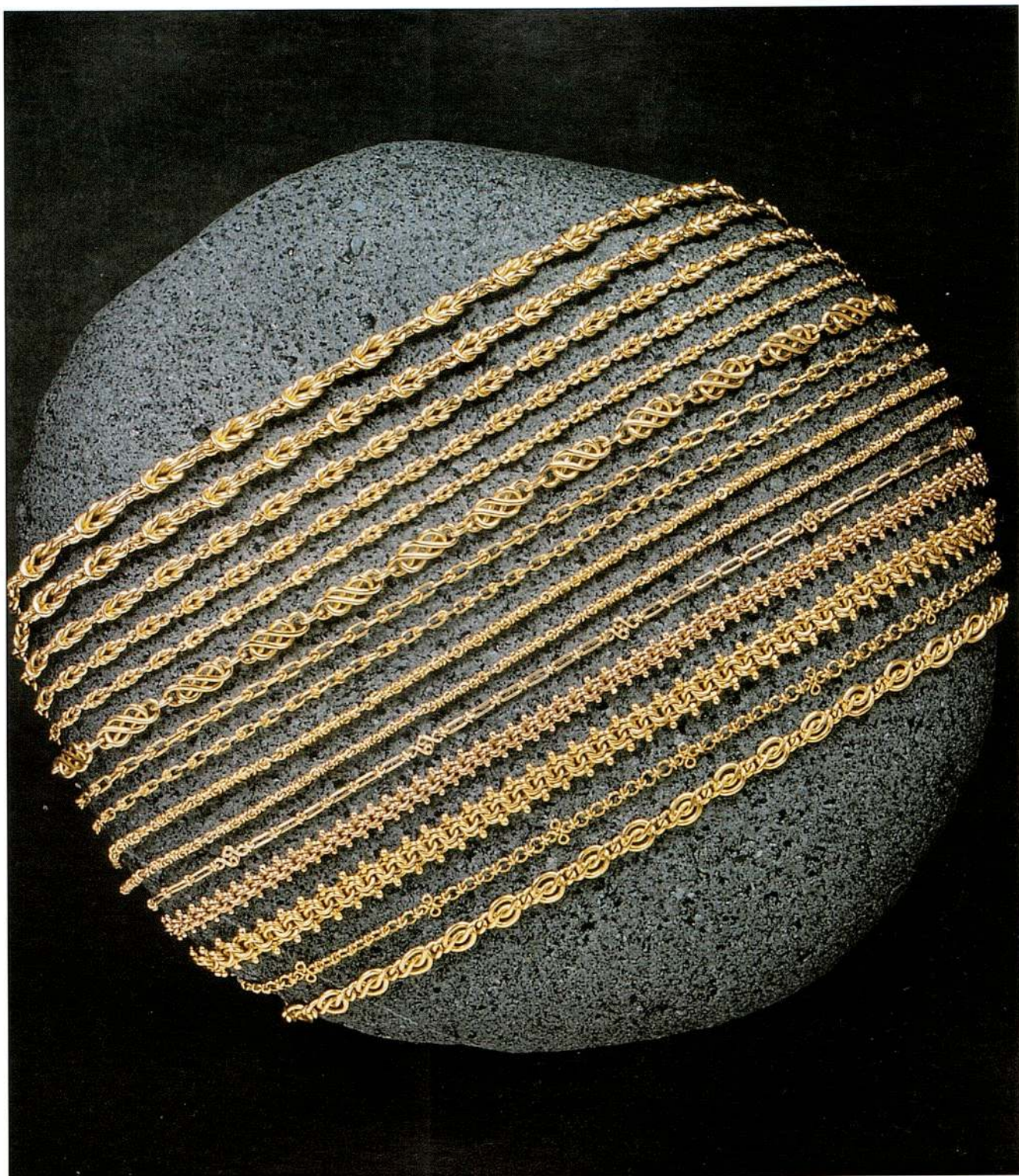
**We talk to the Swiss Goldsmith
who has revived the ancient art
of chainmaking**

A gold chain has become an essential, even commonplace, part of every woman's wardrobe these days, thanks to the machine-making techniques of Italy and Germany. Yet this advance in technology means that very few of us are privileged enough to possess a handmade gold necklace. However, the end of the millennium is seeing a return to traditional and ancient crafts in many ways, not least within the jewellery world. While recent decades have witnessed a peak of excellence in modern and futuristic techniques, now even the ancient art of chain-making by hand is experiencing a renaissance.

The leader of this revival is Swiss goldsmith Lucie Heskett-Brem, whose work embodies both the skills and traditions of the past and the visions of the future. To handle her work is to understand why gold has dominated man's desire for centuries. The strength and the suppleness of movement within each chain makes them seem almost alive. They give off a warmth and depth of colour that is flattering to every face, be it old or young. To wear her chains is to crave them – it is hard to take them off and put them down.



Stunning designs by Lucie Heskett-Brem



Gold chains to suit everyone by the Gold Weaver

Lucie Heskett-Brem was born in Switzerland into a family of dedicated craftsmen. Her father was a sculptor, her brother a photographer and her mother made silver jewellery. However, Lucie did not immediately embark on a career as a goldsmith. She first had a variety of jobs unrelated to the jewellery trade, and having firmly established that office life was definitely not for her, Lucie returned to her roots in Lucerne with her new English husband

in the late '80s. There, she embarked on a four year apprenticeship with a Lucerne goldsmith. She finished in 1992 and set up her own studio at home.

Five years later, she sells out of London, New York and Zurich, and can hardly keep up with the demand. Working between eighty and ninety hours a week, almost entirely alone, she will produce a prototype in silver. Once she has established the correct proportions and movement, she sets to

with the 20 carat gold she habitually works with. She often creates her own high carat yellow, rose and red gold alloys to achieve the richness and warmth of colour that is necessary to her work. First she casts pencil-thick bars, then mills and draws the wire, and one by one forms the links that join together into a chain which seems to take a life of its own. Each inch of chain can take up to two and a half hours to produce, depending on the intricacy of

the design, and the finished product as much as two months. After years of practice, Lucie admits to being able to work anywhere – on an aeroplane or even watching television. She says, "there is something therapeutic about making a chain. On good days my fingers work in perfect coordination, so automatically that I don't need to think about them and can concentrate my mind on something else". Since she spends at least three months of the year travelling to see her clients and outlets, this is probably vital. She has thought about taking on a full-time assistant, but the problems involved far outweigh the benefits. The profits made from her work are minimal, as the gold is expensive and the work time-consuming. To take on an apprentice might mean compromising her standards as well as the time she has available to work. Thus, although you may have to wait a while for your handmade-to-order chain, you can be sure that it has been made by the master.

Lucie's most spectacular piece of work to date is the magnificent Gold Serpent, a three-dimensional chain that is 160cm long and made of 1,318 individual pieces. At £17,500 it may be out of your price range, but it is certainly the ultimate chain. You can wrap it and knot it, wear it as a bracelet, belt or necklace, or simply gaze and gaze at it. The craftsmanship involved in its manufacture is breathtaking. The bestselling chain in the UK is *Regatta*, which was the first she ever made and



Lucie Heskett-Brem



Bentley & Co, jewellers

is spaced with reef or love knots. It is simple and very pretty, and could be worn with anything. The most versatile chain must be the *Salamander* which is interspersed with over fifty settings of the stones of your choice. It breaks up into several pieces and becomes a short necklace, bracelet and earrings, or a long necklace, giving you both daywear and evening wear in one chain. She has also invented a clasp that works into the design of the chain and is almost invisible. This can take some practice to find and open!

A gold chain is deceptively strong and versatile, and Lucie is the best example of how to utilise it. She always uses one as a hairband, and will wear them round her waist, neck, arms and fingers. The chain has manifested itself throughout history in a variety of guises as a symbol of wealth and power, and as a fashion accessory has carried

everything from muffs to quilted Chanel handbags. Today, they are more commonly seen carrying pendants or as a decorative piece in their own right.

Bentley & Co, the antique jewellers of Bond Street, are the London outlet for Lucie Heskett-Brem and held her first London exhibition there in June 1994. Today, her work walks out of the door almost as quickly as it arrives. It might seem odd that an antique jeweller would sell the work of a modern goldsmith, but many of Lucie's designs are fashioned from ancient patterns, some of which are over two thousand years old. In years to come, they will be collectors' pieces, but now they are the ultimate gift. Even if your budget can stretch only as far as a ring, buy it.

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