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OCTOBER 2017

Jeweller



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Man jewels

TIME TO EMBRACE A NEW
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OPTIMISM ABOUND THE MEN'S JEWELLERY SECTOR AS SUPPLIERS REFINE PRODUCTS IN LINE WITH THE AUSSIE MALE'S CONSERVATIVE BUT FAR FROM DULL DEMANDS. EMILY MOBBS REPORTS.

Men's jewellery is traditionally a subject met with trepidation but the tides are turning. Indeed, 2017 could be the year that men's jewellery solidifies its place as both a necessary and highly sought after category.

"Jewellery used to be a divisive topic for men, but almost every guy we saw on the streets was wearing at least one necklace," *Vogue.com* reported in June as part of its street style coverage of the spring 2018 menswear fashion shows.

The renowned fashion publication also highlights the return of the 'male cleavage' – yes, that 1970s Mick Jagger look is being embraced by a new crop of men, championed by the likes of former One Direction band member and now soloist singer Harry Styles.

It's not only necklaces of course. Type 'men's jewellery 2017 trends' into Google and a bevy of results will show guys wearing unique combinations of bracelets, rings and necklaces.

Industry sceptics who assume that the penchant for men to adorn themselves with jewellery is restricted to international markets, and doesn't translate locally, best think again too.

If there's one thing men's jewellery suppliers in Australia can agree on it's that the landscape has changed, largely for the better.

"The market for men's jewellery has come a long way for us in the past

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15 years since acquiring Cudworth," Cudworth Enterprises director Darren Roberts says.

Roberts is the fourth owner of Cudworth, the men's jewellery business that was founded in 1918, and is arguably well positioned to comment on the sector's evolution and future.

"There is still a lot of potential and growth in this sector because men are feeling more comfortable as they embrace wearing jewellery," he continues.

As an example of his confidence in the category, Roberts recently added luxury London-based men's jewellery range Tateossian to the Cudworth portfolio.

The range made its official local debut at the International Jewellery Fair in August and is primarily targeted at affluent males aged 25 years or more.

While Roberts says that men's jewellery offerings have come and gone in recent years, he welcomes competition that provides high-quality product.

"I think it is healthy to have competition as we cannot supply all retailers, especially in the same city or town," Roberts explains. "[However] the sector is damaged when poor quality products enter the market at low prices; it diminishes the overall product offered."

Another business specialising in men's jewellery is Kavalri, which has a retail store in Melbourne as well as national retail stockists.

Like Roberts, Kavalri founder and director Tom Boie says the sector is expanding Down Under.

"I think it can now be widely accepted that men's jewellery and accessories has rapidly evolved from a niche category towards



CUDWORTH ENTERPRISES

becoming a mainstream product for men," he states. "Even in the five years since launching Kavalri, I have most definitely witnessed the pace of growth picking up."

Boie explains that today's male consumers – and their partners – are more inclined to purchase 'lifestyle' jewellery pieces worn to complement a certain style or look rather than limiting themselves to a one-off expensive item.

"This shift in purchase behaviour probably highlights the biggest change, with men no longer being one-off jewellery purchasers but far more likely to repeat-purchase jewellery and accessory items that appeal to them," he says.

"This has certainly been our experience; our customers repeat-purchase different jewellery and accessories to wear with certain outfits or for specific occasions – sometimes they get a variation of the same bracelet so they can mix it up."

A TAILORED OFFERING

Aussie males may be increasingly accepting of accessorising with jewellery; however, many seek a conservative, refined and masculine look, which is often a different set of requests to other parts of the world.

By all accounts, suppliers are dedicated in ensuring that products are meeting the demands of local men.

"We have worked hard to differentiate ourselves by tailoring products that blend both masculinity and contemporary style," Boie says.

"It's something we feel appeals directly with men and has helped us develop a heavily-engaged local customer base."

Roberts explains that he monitors international trends and adapts them

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Trendsetter

TOM HOPE

Current hot looks for men include:

Bracelets, bracelets and more bracelets – teaming with a watch is where it's at right now, but there's nothing wrong with layering bracelets on their own either

Beads, gemstones, leather and stainless steel are a perfect match

Aged or antique plating that gives a 'worn' appearance

Anything nautical-inspired

accordingly to local demands. "I watch what is happening overseas for trends, which is not always suited to our market. I sometimes get inspiration and then rework pieces that will suit our market," Roberts says, adding that retailers can increase a man's interest in jewellery by keeping the offering masculine and fashionable.

So what jewellery styles are currently defining the sector?

"Right now, it's the fashion of mixing real gemstones with leather," Roberts states. "It is the strongest part of our jewellery business at the moment."

He adds that old-time favourite stainless steel remains popular owing to its durability and that pieces with antique plating – be it a pendant, bracelet or cufflink – are performing well.

Commenting on the top-performing categories, Roberts points to the supplier's bracelets featuring leather and gemstones as well as items with a nautical theme.

Speaking of bracelets and the nautical-inspired, Tom Hope is a recent entrant into the local jewellery scene that combines both of these areas.

Distributed locally by BYMR, the Swedish collection of unisex

handmade bracelets feature whipping twine in various colours that are secured with an anchor made from sterling silver, IP plated stainless steel or solid brass. They are often paired with watches, which is a major trend at the moment.

BYMR managing director Nils Rasmussen announced the exclusive distribution deal in July and says the feedback and support since has been overwhelming.

"Independent jewellers love the fact that this is a range that will appeal to customers who already have purchased a watch from the many trend-based brands that are now so strong in the market," Rasmussen explains.

"It is expected to add momentum to the trend for watches with pastel and striped Nato watch bands, and provide a nice little add-on sale for these customers."

Importantly, Rasmussen is confident that the range will be popular amongst men.

He explains that global online sales data shows an even split of the male and female consumer, and this is a trend expected to continue offline.

"It will be popular among Australian men, as it's a trend-oriented product with a nautical theme but is unlike any of the more traditional men's jewellery available, which has always been hard to sell," Rasmussen says, adding, "The colour palette of the collection is quite conservative, not unlike the Australian male when it comes to selecting jewellery. Online sales have been from 18-24-year-olds but we are expecting offline sales to skew to an older age bracket."

HOT ARMS

Arm candy sure is hot right now in the men's department.

"For the Thomas Sabo Rebel at Heart collection, bracelets are definitely our top sellers – in particular beaded bracelets," explains Phil Edwards, managing director of Duraflex Group Australia, the local distributor of Thomas Sabo.

Tiger's eye and matte obsidian beaded bracelets are heroes in this season's Rebel at Heart range, which celebrates its 10th anniversary this year.

Edwards points to injections of agate, treated red bamboo coral, reconstituted turquoise and jasper as being other new season updates.



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He too notes the increasing trend to combine bracelets and watches: "It's all about layering for Thomas Sabo wearers, creating a statement on the wrist – hence, our beaded bracelets being the hero for sales. It's the perfect complement to a watch as you will see in our advertising campaign."

Boie says men are just as often wearing bracelets sans watch.

"With the emergence of the smartphone it may be fair to say that the primary purpose of watches is less important, as such bracelets can somewhat fill a void of something stylish to be worn on the wrist," he explains, adding that bracelets

and cufflinks are key-performing categories for Kavalri.

"One of our fastest-moving products are our leather and stainless steel combinations, in particular our double-wrap leather bracelets with a matte black steel clasp," he states. "Men like this product, as it's a simple and stylish accessory that they can wear each day – this is also a fantastic option for a gift."

Like Roberts, Boie says the aged – or antique – metal look is currently in high demand. He also expects a soon-to-be released 'ultra-masculine-edgy' cuff collection to be a hit with Aussie men.

Without taking away from the ever-popular bracelet phenomenon, Boie sees opportunity in fashion rings as well.

"One product category that we recently launched is our custom-made black zirconium fashion rings," he states. "With so much focus on bracelets there has been less attention on men's fashion rings and I feel that in the coming years they too will become increasingly popular."

EXTRA ENCOURAGEMENT

Males may be more accepting of jewellery but a little nudge to encourage them and their partners to make a purchase never goes astray.

When asked how retailers could make more men interested in jewellery, local suppliers were unanimous in the importance of promoting high-profile and relatable associations.

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Roberts says celebrity endorsements always help, and Edwards notes that the key lies in projecting a certain 'lifestyle'.

"It's about more than just jewellery, it's a lifestyle," Edwards states. "Thomas Sabo also has strong affiliations in the sporting world, with various international sponsorships that span a variety of sports including ice hockey, motor sports and football."

Boie says any 'celebrity' references used in an effort to tap into a man's willingness to purchase jewellery must be easily relatable.

"For example, sporting stars are a fantastic reference point as this showcases strength and masculinity while highlighting confidence in men wearing jewellery," he explains.

"People like soccer superstars Cristiano Ronaldo and David Beckham, F1 racing car driver Lewis Hamilton, rugby player Sonny Bill Williams and actor Orlando Bloom are just a few easy to relate to personalities that wear jewellery and accessories."

Ultimately, Boie says jewellers need to realise the opportunities presented by men's jewellery and thus take the category seriously.

"I am confident that the men's jewellery and accessories space will grow extremely quickly here in Australia," he states.

"You only need to look at the US, Canada and Europe where men's jewellery is fast becoming a mainstream product category. Australia has started a little slower but the momentum has really picked up over the past few years. It is such a complementary product category for any jewellery retailer to have in store."

With new suppliers and product ranges emerging and existing ones stepping up, the opportunities have never seemed greater.

Wedding rings, watches and cufflinks will remain staples but the men's jewellery scene now represents so much more.

While the 'male cleavage' is definitely an acquired taste, the comforting news for jewellers is that the majority of offerings are versatile and relatively low-key – all perfect for the Aussie man who typically applies a less-is-more philosophy to accessorising.

It's time to embrace a new frontier in men's jewellery. ✱



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