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## Fairtrade, Fairmined, and the Ethical Gold Rush

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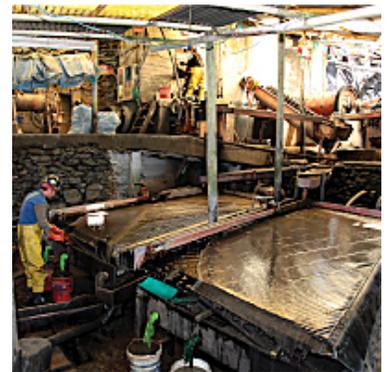
Fairmined gold pellets ready for the melting process in Chopard's gold foundry in Meyrin, Switzerland

**In the fall** of 2013, Torry Hoover achieved a goal 10 years in the making: Hoover & Strong, the North Chesterfield, Va.–based metal refinery his family founded in 1912, made Fairmined-certified gold—that is, gold sourced from an artisanal mine that operates according to safe practices and leaves - minimal environmental impact—available to Americans for the first time.

But it wasn't an easy process. The effort began in 2003 when Corvallis, Ore.–based jewelry designer Toby Pomeroy asked Hoover & Strong to provide a 100 percent recycled metal. That request gave rise to the 2008 introduction of the refiner's Harmony brand of recycled silver, gold, palladium, and platinum. Last fall, Hoover, who serves as president, fulfilled Pomeroy's original goal of finding an ethical gold supplier when he teamed up with Ethical Metalsmiths—a College Corner, Ohio–based nonprofit that educates and encourages responsible mining practices and sustainable economic development by verifying sources that claim to be ethical—to refine 2 kilos of Fairmined gold into 18k and 24k gold mill products, including grain, sheet, and wire.

“We started this journey in our Harmony division with recycled gold, but my vision was that recycled metal would not be the only solution” to the scourge of irresponsible mining, Hoover says.

While there isn't a lot of Fairmined metal in the marketplace and the certified gold that does exist carries a 10 percent premium over non-Fairmined material, the tide appears to be turning. At last month's Baselworld fair in Switzerland, Chopard presented the L.U.C Tourbillon QF Fairmined, the world's first timepiece to be encased in Fairmined gold. The model, which comes in a limited edition of 25 pieces, continues what the Swiss jeweler has dubbed “The Journey,” a campaign to market sustainable and ethical luxury products.



Gravimetric tables separating gold from pulverized rock at the Coodmilla mine in La Llanada, Colombia



Gold at the Coodmilla mine in La Llanada, Colombia

Last year, Chopard debuted a Green Carpet collection of haute joaillerie using gold sourced from the Coodmilla cooperative in the Nariño region of Colombia and ethically obtained gemstones certified by the Responsible Jewellery Council. The Colombian collective is working with the Alliance for Responsible Mining, or ARM, a Cambridge, U.K.–based group that promotes legal and safe mining practices in artisanal communities and administers the Fairmined certification. Through Chopard's support, the Colombian mine was able to begin the process of achieving Fairmined status. (Those in the know say the company invested upwards of \$600,000 in Coodmilla.)

Kenneth Porter, director of business development for the Fairmined unit of ARM in Medellín, Colombia, says the terms of Fairmined status mandate that mine operators provide safe working conditions and health care and benefits for miners. By contrast,

large mines are linked to environmental hazards and cases of human rights abuse. Artisanally mined gold is also less destructive to the earth, easier to trace, and becoming more important for consumers—which is serendipitous, given that Fairmined-certified gold was made available in the United States for the first time last fall thanks to Hoover & Strong's initiative. As a result, more designers are making use of it.

Those wishing to make jewelry using Fairmined gold must obtain a license, which entitles use of the logo and all the promotional claims that go along with it. As of now, licenses are primarily being sought by designers, but retailers who make their own jewelry can apply for them, too. (A license is not necessary to buy Fairmined gold, only to use the Fairmined logo.)

To date, ARM has issued 23 U.S. Fairmined licenses, the bulk of them for small users—those who use just 500 grams of Fairmined gold a year—or sellers of less than \$1.5 million worth of Fairmined gold. License applicants complete an ARM-issued form, pay a \$60 fee, and then they're off and running.

Although 20 mines worldwide are working toward certification, there are just two Fairmined-certified mines currently producing gold—both of which are located in Peru (the Aurelsa mine in Relave and the Sotrami mine in Santa Filomena, which is also Fairtrade certified).



L.U.C. Tourbillon QF Fairmined in 43 mm Fairmined 18k rose gold case; \$144,570; Chopard, NYC; 800-CHOPARD; [us.chopard.com](http://us.chopard.com)



The town of Relave, Peru, where the Aurelsa mine workers live

The difference between Fairmined and Fairtrade metals is minimal and mostly has to do with the certifying organizations. Like Fairmined metal, the latter is also sourced from artisanal mines that adhere to safe mining practices and are certified by an independent auditor, though Fairtrade adherents fall under the direction of Fairtrade International, a Bonn, Germany-based organization. For now, Fairtrade metals are only available overseas, though Amy Ross, Fairtrade International gold project manager, tells *JCK* to “expect Fairtrade gold to launch in the U.S. in the next year or so.”

Longtime users of Fairtrade gold share the same goals as Fairmined proponents. British jeweler Stephen Webster sells Fairtrade gold bridal jewelry in his London boutique. “I thought...why not offer the first supplies to couples getting engaged?” he says. In early 2011, before being one of the first jewelers in the world to acquire a Fairtrade license, Webster traveled to Peru to see who would benefit; the results were

eye-opening. A video of his trip shows him at the Aurelsa mine and in the surrounding village, where miners live in one-story concrete dwellings in a barren desert landscape.

As for that 10 percent premium, Webster absorbs it. “We don't want price to be the reason not to choose a more responsible product,” he says.

Designer Pippa Small, also based in London, worked with the Cotapata mine in Bolivia for seven years while it worked to meet Fairtrade Foundation standards. The mine achieved certification in 2010, and now 20 percent of Small's offerings are made with Cotapata gold. “It has been a vital part of our move to become more ethical,” she adds.

In the U.S., Pomeroy is widely considered the first U.S. jewelry designer to have kicked off the ethical metals movement when he asked Hoover & Strong for the recycled metals that gave rise to the refiner's Harmony division. Pomeroy crafts bridal pieces in his trademarked TRUEGOLD 14k and 18k gold and platinum, which he sourced from the Oro Verde mine in the Chocó bioregion of Colombia. That relationship ended in 2013 when Oro Verde halted sales to jewelers, and at press time, Pomeroy was en route to visit the Coodmilla mine.



Christina Miller, executive director of Ethical Metalsmiths, during her visit to the Aurelsa mine in Relave, Peru

“There's no mercury and no cyanide used in the separation process of gold from ore—they use gravity separation,” says Pomeroy, an ARM board member. “We want to offer gold that is mined in an environmentally and socially

responsible way without any chemicals,” he says.



Miners at the Aurelsa Fairmined-certified site in Relave, Peru

Industrywide, however, it's still early days for ethically sourced metals—though a number of the big players are making good progress. In Lafayette, La., Stuller's in-house manufactured gold and silver items, for example, are made with 100 percent recycled metals certified by SCS Global Services, while newly mined gold is used sparingly. At Rio Grande in Albuquerque, N.M., the product team says its “green-colored item numbers are all either recycled gold or silver or ethically mined—bought from a mine that belongs to the Responsible Jewellery Council.” Similarly, all of Hoover & Strong's metals are sourced from recycling or Fairmined-certified sources.

Then there's the OroAfrica collection of bridal jewelry made from certified “responsible” gold from Germiston, South Africa's Rand Refinery. The brand maintains that while its gold is not Fairtrade or Fairmined certified, it is traceable and, according to a spokesperson, “fits very well with the principles...of the Fairtrade organization.”

And while Fairmined and ethically sourced metals are largely used in bridal jewelry—the idea resonates with the commitment-minded—there's hope that American consumers will soon see them transition into fine fashion jewelry. All that's needed, says Christina T. Miller, Ethical Metalsmiths' executive director, is for Fairmined “to hit a tipping point.”

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