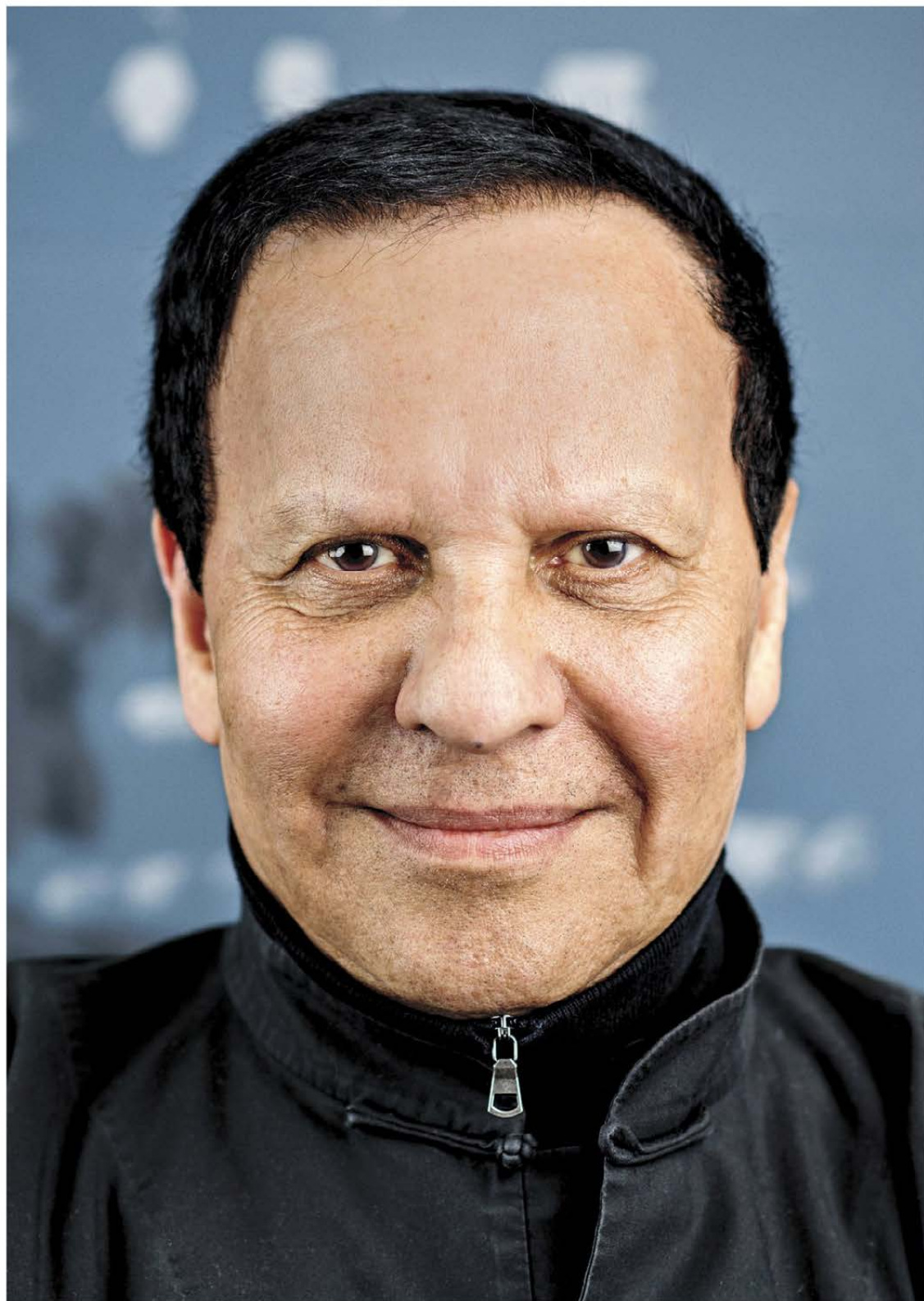


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STUDIO VISIT **Monique Péan**

The jewelry designer discusses her new SoHo studio, creating fashionable, wearable pieces from fossils, and her travels to all seven continents.

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How long have you been working on your new studio?

About two years. I've been working with the architecture and design firm Charlap Hyman & Herrero. I think it's the first time I've been able to have an environment where I can really invite people and collectors into my world.

I've always had a love for monochromatic, minimal environments, and wanted to create a clean space. Having been to both Japan and England, it was exciting to be able to look at garden architecture from the Victorian era, as well as from Japan, to be able to think about inspiration for the roof. By bringing in the black Japanese rock, black wood, and the minimal concrete furniture, we were able to have that juxtaposition.

Were you into gardening before, or was it something that came with the space?

I have a little rooftop garden outside my apartment in SoHo. I've been doing some urban gardening, but not to this extent. Here, it's a drought-resistant garden, so it's sustainable and doesn't require significant irrigation, which would be harmful for the environment. The plants are all native to New York. We worked with Mackenzie Younger, who runs a landscape architecture and botany firm, to identify local black plants for the garden.

A fossilized dinosaur bone, one of the materials found in Monique Péan's designs. (OPPOSITE) Péan at her studio in New York.

Sustainability is one of the major pillars of your brand. It's cool that you're able to work that into your space.

Definitely. I designed a table using an old piece of wood from a fallen black walnut tree from California. I've also used found balsa wood, and driftwood to create sculptural elements, adding in selenite crystals, petrified wood, and reclaimed metals throughout the studio.

When designing—your studio and your jewelry—do you research these materials as you go, or is it something that you've studied?

I studied philosophy, political science, and economics. When I began designing I became interested in learning about the process of making fine jewelry. I traveled to the Arctic Circle and had the privilege of being greeted by these Alaska-native Eskimos of the Iñupiat and Yupik tribes. They're known as some of the world's first environmentalists. They've found materials that come in and go out with the tide. These are primarily fossilized walrus tusks, and the root of the tooth of the fossilized woolly mammoth. It's similar to finding a shell on the beach, but depending on where the fossils have been resting, the minerals change the color over time. >



Early on in your career you worked at Goldman Sachs. Do you ever miss working in finance?

Not really. However, I will say that when Brexit happened, for the first time in 10 years, I thought to myself, It would be interesting to be on the trading floor tomorrow morning.

Do you feel a sense of responsibility for putting rare materials into something equally as incredible?

Absolutely. I definitely wouldn't carve them down. In larger forms, they go to museums and the curatorial and/or scientific committees. In smaller forms, they can be used for jewelry, sculpture, or art. If you don't know what you're looking at, it's just a rock, but these are incredible fossils that are hundreds of millions of years old.

Travel is such a big part of your design inspiration, but why is it important for New York to be your home base?

I'm also very inspired by contemporary and modern art and minimalism, and to have my studio across the street from Walter de Maria's "Broken Kilometer" is pretty incredible. Donald Judd's studio and de Maria's "Earth Room" are just a few blocks away. I often force collectors and visitors in the studio to go across the street, even if they don't have time. It really does change through the seasons—going in the spring vs. going in in the winter. They're closed in the summertime. Otherwise, I'd be taking you there.

But now we've got a garden to enjoy in the summer.

Exactly! It's amazing to be able to work in New York. I'm able to work with master craftsmen here, who will work with me to hand-carve the dinosaur bone and the fossilized walrus, and to be able to perfect each individual piece. I need to be involved from steps A to Z. Using materials that aren't meant for fine jewelry requires some expertise.

You're like an archeologist.

I try to be. I've been building my collection of fossils for a while now. The dinosaur bone joint was a birthday present to myself.

Do you think you now have the eye to spot a dinosaur bone?

I'm still learning, but it's improving over time. I love working with fossils because a picture captures a moment in time, but the fossils are capturing tens of thousands of years at a time, if not hundreds of millions of years at a time.

Speaking of years, your brand turns 10 this year.

And in the last 10 years I've been to all seven continents, which is really exciting. As is being able to find inspiration and work with artisans in the Arctic, and then having the opportunity to go to Antarctica and see the polar opposite and work with glaciologists and marine biologists. I've worked with diamonds from Australia, Caribbean opal, and black jade from Guatemala. I've been able to see how the environment is being affected, and to design pieces that can highlight and raise awareness of some of these issues. I want the pieces to be more than what they are on the surface level in terms of the aesthetics.

It's interesting that you pair a natural material or inspiration with an architectural reference. It's almost like you think as an architect would, reconciling nature's elements with man-made lines.

I'm often looking at light and angles as the day passes. It's true even in designing the studio. When I was in Japan, visiting Naoshima and looking at Tadao Ando's work, I saw the way the sun sets and sun rises and how that affects the angles and geometry. It was spectacular visiting Arches National Park and seeing all of these beautiful natural arches, and then traveling to the northwest corner of Utah and visiting



Nancy Holt's "Sun Tunnels," with the summer solstice having just happened. I've also looked at Mayan architecture, and thought about the pyramids they built juxtaposed with modern architecture.

How do you pick the places you travel to?

I do a lot of research in terms of looking for natural as well as architectural inspiration, and really trying to create that tension. I also like to insure that there will be sustainable materials that I can work with and artisans that I can partner with in those locations.

What types of artisans have you worked with?

I've worked with master dinosaur bone carvers at the Colorado Plateau and artisans who hand-carve Guatemalan jade outside of Antigua. There's tectonic activity in Guatemala, so the earth separates and jade comes to the surface naturally. Going to Utah was interesting for me because I was able to go and experience a journey right here. I'm so used to going to far-flung places like to the Arctic Circle, to Antarctica, to Japan, to Guatemala. There's art all around you, and throughout the country and the world.



(FROM TOP) Inside Péan's studio. Fossilized walrus ivory, dinosaur bone, and pieces of a 1-million-year-old meteorite. (OPPOSITE, FROM TOP) A portion of the studio's rooftop garden. Jewelry on display. Péan sketching.