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True GRIP

New York jewellery designer Marla Aaron finds beauty in carabiners, vending machines and old motor car factories. And now, with her pieces available at Hamilton & Inches, she is hoping people in the capital will do too

By Jane Mackay

PRECIOUS things should be easily accessible, handled and above all, be worn and loved," says Marla Aaron, the sassy New Yorker who has given hardware a glamorous twist with her industrial inspired collection of fine jewellery, including her signature carabiner locks.

Inspired by an obsession for hardware, her namesake collection combines utility, craftsmanship and glamour in precious metals and gems.

Fans include actresses Blake Lively and Elle Fanning and women who like to "wear it their way" with her brilliantly versatile and inter-changeable pieces.

Aaron has just flown in to the capital to attend Hamilton & Inches Designer Showcase event where she is debuting the collection exclusively in Scotland and there's a buzz of excitement and curiosity as people gather round to see her work.

Among them is a woman who has made a two-hour journey from her home in Fife to meet the designer and see some of the collection at first hand.

The fan, Catherine, tells me she follows Aaron on Instagram and loves the bold designs and playfulness in her work.

We stand aside and watch in wonderment as people begin to drop their Edinburgh reserve and, encouraged by Aaron, pick up, pass around and play about with the fascinating pieces which she has brought across the Atlantic to showcase at the event.

It's an exciting and eclectic collection including many of the exquisite linked

chains and signature locks available exclusively in Scotland at Hamilton & Inches. There are other treasures, including the intriguing inter-locking ring, a miniature masterpiece of engineering, which opens up to reveal a secret message.

She has also brought across some eye-catching statement pieces featuring the colourful Fordite – the multi-layers of paint chiselled up from the floors of the Ford car factories in Detroit.

Aaron, wearing a signature lock and large Fordite drop earrings, is in her element; answering questions, explaining the concept behind her work and handing out precious gold chains, pearl strands and bejewelled hard-ware to an enthusiastic audience who can't wait to try them on.

"I love it when people want to explore my jewellery," she said illustrating the multiple ways in which to wear her pieces. Through a swift sleight of hand, she unbolts and reconnects locks to chains like a magician performing a magic trick.

"It's made to be enjoyed. And I also love it when customers personalise my jewellery. I find that endlessly inspiring."

Aaron launched her "rebellious little company" in 2013, after a career as

a communications executive when her self-proclaimed "obsessions" with jewellery, bridges and hardware became the unlikely inspiration for her first eponymous collection.

"It all started with an industrial size carabiner lock," she explained, "The strength and utility of this object really struck me as a very interesting story that could be told in fine jewellery. I became totally obsessed with its functionality and versatility."

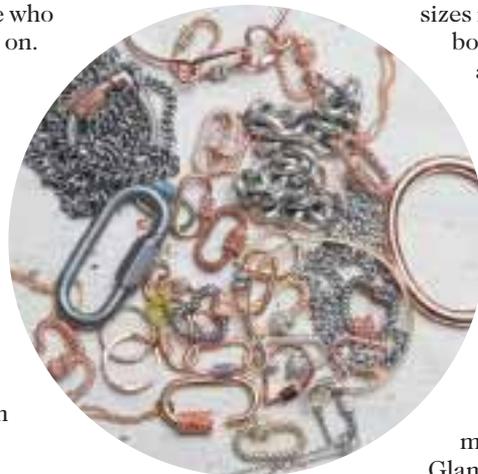
Unlike the original industrial steel counterparts, Aaron's hand-made carabiners are made from prized materials – mainly platinum and gold – and available

in an assortment of shapes and sizes including hearts, boomerangs, stars and a Ziggy Stardust influenced lightning bolt.

Some are plain and industrial, others are inlaid with enamel and stones or have been generously "sugared" with an abundance of colourful gems, making them even more irresistible.

Glamorous yet utilitarian at the same time.

A lucky owner of one of these beautiful, hand-crafted pieces can expect to pay anything from £85 for the



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small silver baby lock to £7,000 for the exceptional inlaid Blue Sapphire All Stone.

Fordite, made from discarded motor vehicle paints found on plant floors, is also of high value and in great demand.

“When I first heard about the existence of Fordite I went into a kind of tailspin,” she laughed.

“I always have to push the envelope so when I heard about it, I had to have some and people are entranced by a discarded material that we turn into something beautiful.”

The material itself resembles multi-coloured layers of natural strata and represents cultural periods through the decades, as Aaron explained that certain colours were more prevalent during particular eras.

“I realised as we cut through different

layers of paint that we were actually exposing history and what was once dried up paint on a floor has become the precious stuff of my dreams – in 18k yellow gold.”

Part of the appeal of Aaron’s work is the playful contradictory theme of delicacy and strength – often incorporating an edgy twist to a classic look.

It’s a paradox that plays out in other ways too such as the way she breaks down barriers, making her exclusive pieces available outside of the traditional jewellery store.

One such way is the #LockYourMom giveaway campaign for single mums on Mother’s Day.

Prompted by her own experience of lone parenting, Aaron and her team send out several hundred silver heart-shaped locks via requests through her Instagram site.

“I was a single mum and I know how tough it is,” she said.

“I always felt bad on Mother’s Day and I know how it feels when everyone around you is celebrating their ‘motherliness,’” she explained.

Last year, Aaron gave away more than 300 heart locks throughout the US and would love to expand the campaign beyond the States. Most recently, she caused a sensation when she began selling her collection direct to customers via a vending machine – albeit a luxury one – installed at the Brooklyn Museum in New York.

This unorthodox way of reaching consumers in such an innovative way should be no great surprise to fans of Marla Aaron.

It’s a natural evolution for the woman who believes precious things should be accessible to all.

Marla Aaron is available at Hamilton & Inches, 87 George Street, EH2 3EY. marlaaaron.com