DIAMONDS ARE NO FUN IF THERE'S NO EDGE. DESIGNER HANNAH MARTIN CHANNELS SOME ROCK ATTITUDE INTO HER COLLECTION OF LUSCIOUS JEWELS. MORRISSEY'S ALREADY A FAN, BUT NICK CAVE MIGHT JUST BE TOO MUCH

TEXT BY DEAN MAYO DAVIES
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACOB SUTTON

Hannah Martin is the London jeweler with personality. Her spirit infiltrates through the hard-core romance of her pieces, which evoke the concepts of personal one-offs, the selection different at each of her stockists thanks to her penchant for finding editing "difficult" beyond narrowing down the forty designs (and a number of options) per showcase.

Martin had an auspicious start at one of the world's foremost jewelers, but it never felt like a perfect fit. "Four years ago, I was in Paris doing a consultancy at Cartier," she explains. "I learned so much from them, and it was an amazing experience that I loved, but it didn't feel like me at all. I was working with incredible materials—and I love the really luxurious—but it wasn't really my style." Then came her eureka moment. "I was hanging out with my friends and watching pretty French boys play in clubs in the evenings, at dirty rock and roll bars, thinking, This is so weird, I have two lives going on."

On returning to London, Martin set about making her two sides meet. She founded her own eponymous brand, taking the irreducible allure of high-end jewelry (and materials like black diamonds, sapphires, and rubies) and marrying it with a hard-edged, slightly dangerous aesthetic. With that, Hannah Martin, the jewelry, was born.

Hailing from the West of England, a part of Britain as famous for its fields and agriculture as much as its largest city, Bristol, the designer grew up in suburbs and had a happy yet unremarkable childhood. "At school I was always into art," she says, "though not fashion at all. I wasn't one of those people that waited for *Vogue* to come every month.

I had my own distinctive style—grunge girl, I suppose. There was a little gang of us at school who used to listen to Nirvana and be 'those girls.'"

All this isn't to say the desire to study at Saint Martins wasn't there—she did. But it was sculpture that Martin aspired to. "That was my thing and I loved it," she explains over coffee at her Clerkenwell studio, the Rolling Stones rattling away on the stereo. "But when I got to London I did some stuff with jewelry on the foundation course and that was it. It was like sculpture on the smallest scale and you could wear it! The most personal kind of sculpture."

If there is such a thing as a designer's designer, then Martin has the potential to become a jeweler's jeweler, such is her no-nonsense integrity. Three collections in, she doesn't fit with a fashion schedule and refuses to launch a diffusion line. She won't class her output as men's or women's, though initially it was "men's jewelry that girlfriends want to steal." There's no need for classification.

"I sort of move through different influences," says Martin of her creative process. "With each presentation I have a story and a character I create. The last one was Vincent, this Russian gangster. That's how I design. I have this world I build up. My imagination runs a bit wild."

It's when she creates this framework for a collection that more transient inspirations can enter. "For Vincent, I was looking at a lot of Russian modernist art, Communist propaganda, and the big, solid Russian architecture of the 1930s." Her mood for each collection remains important, yet it never overrides her stylistic signature. You spot a Hannah Martin piece instantly, whatever the subtext may be.

Having made a fiftieth-birthday present for Morrissey, an idol she's never actually met—"It's too perfect isn't it?" she laughs of the enigma—as well as catering to his guitarist Jesse Tobias, the designer would most love to see her body ornamentation on L.A. rebels like Courtney Love and Johnny Depp. "And Nick Cave too, who is my absolute idol.

If I did something for him, I don't think I'd be able to cope with the excitement, I'd collapse."

But whatever you think, whatever you take away from her, don't let it be that her rocks are too precious to, er, rock every day. "I totally want that," she says. "I love the idea that my jewelry can be something you wear 24/7. I'd hate nothing more than for people to put it away for a special occasion, just sitting in a box in a drawer. It's got to become a part of you. Don't be precious, just wear it."

ENTREPRENEUR BENJAMIN LEBRAVE HAD A HUNCH THAT AFRICAN DANCE MUSIC HAD LEGS OUTSIDE SENEGALESE NIGHTCLUBS. HIS RECORD LABEL, AKWAABA, MIGHT BE THE MOST EVOLVING SNAPSHOT OF THE CONTINENT'S BRAVE NEW SCENE

TEXT BY NATALIE JOOS / PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK SQUIRES

When Benjamin Lebrave traveled to Africa for the first time to sample local musical talent, he was invited to the home of a Ghanaian musician for dinner. His host served the nation's favorite comfort food: goat head. "You know chicken wings in the States? It was pieces of bone that size, but there was no meat on it!" he laughs. "I tried it to be polite, but it was absolutely disgusting."

Leaving each destination with a full stomach and a treasure of invaluable cultural knowledge and musical gems, Lebrave visited countries like Senegal, Mali, Benin, and the Ivory Coast before returning to Los Angeles to start up Akwaaba, a music label that serves as a platform for African pop culture and represents "music by locally established yet globally isolated artists, regardless of musical style or genre."

Growing up as a DJ, Lebrave had an insatiable passion for unique and unusual sounds. "It used to be pretty easy to find stuff that was off the radar," he remembers. "You could go to an obscure record shop and there would be hard-to-find stuff, whereas now it's all online. Then I remember my friends in Paris coming back from Ghana with tapes of local music. It sounded like nothing I had ever heard! It was a little bit like dancehall with an almost Caribbean vibe." Armed with a double master's degree in economics and statistics, it didn't take Lebrave long to figure out how to launch his own label and promote his extraordinary acquisitions.

Akwaaba means "welcome" in Twi, the dominant language of the Ashanti people of Ghana. But even with this open-door policy and 21st-century technology, Lebrave found that Africa is still a pretty secluded continent. "There is a great need for an outlet," he explains. "There is so much music being made there, but for the most part it never reaches further than the diaspora." Most music does not leave Africa because it's assumed to be unpalatable to Western audiences; it is often considered cheesy. As Lebrave explains, "The production quality used to be terrible. You'd buy a tape and it would be exotic and fun with a cute cover, but it sounded like shit!"

In recent years, however, quality has been rising. "Most music is recorded digitally now, and you don't need that much to make it sound okay," says Lebrave. One of Akwaaba's best-selling artists, Killamu—a kuduro producer from Angola—operates his production house from a wood shack in the middle of the ghetto in Luanda. "Even the most desolate places have PCs. It's usually a pretty beat-up computer that you have to reboot all the time, but that's basically all you need. Even though the tools are still expensive, they have become more accessible. The Internet however is still alarmingly scarce and slow. That's one of the reasons why what I'm doing makes so much sense. If they had Internet they could probably just skip me."

In response to the increasing demand of Western DJs and audiences, Akwaaba released a successful compilation of kuduro last summer titled *Akwaaba Sem Transporte* and, earlier this year, Killamu's well-received *A Minha Face*. Kuduro is Portuguese slang for "hard-ass," perhaps in reference to the tirelessly energetic genre and the music's pumping, club-friendly beats and hyperactive rhymes. Kuduro started as a street-style dance movement in the late '80s in Angola, and has since developed its instrumental, structural, and melodic capacities. As such it has caught the attention of internationally-acclaimed DJs like Sinden and Diplo. "I've been playing kuduro for ages," raves Diplo. "The production is very progressive for electronic music, which is ironic for African music." Other artists like Buraka Som Sistema from Portugal have also been instrumental in leaking kuduro to larger audiences. BSS has toured the States twice and recorded with M.I.A.

A recent Cadbury's ad featuring Ghanaian hip-life artist Tinny sums up how Lebrave sees the future for African music in general and his company specifically: "Show Africa in a genuine way, yet make it accessible and enjoyable. And do it with deep-pocketed partners! Up until now I haven't really been producing, so the next step for me is to set up some kind of structure locally and open one or two studios, hopefully in partnership. Open call to all who read this!" Goat head, anyone?