

Accessories Report

The Cause Behind Venetian Masks

By Sophia Chabbott

Young Friends of Save Venice hopes red and white will be the colors of choice for fall.

The charitable organization, which seeks to help restore and protect Venice's threatened masterpieces from water damage and pollution, has called on 24 designers, artists and fashion companies to aid the cause.

Christian Lacroix, Rodarte and Ross Bleckner are among those that have created versions of Venetian masks to be auctioned Tuesday night at the Veneto Sales and Design Center in New York.

The designers had to incorporate Swarovski crystals with a theme of red and white, but otherwise had free rein.

"I did some research because I wanted it to be Venice-connected," said accessories designer Devi Kroell, who incorporated metallic python that is used on her slouchy hobo bags and over-the-knee boots. "I wanted it to be signature me."

The inspiration for Rachel Roy's mask was "The Art of Seduction," said the designer. "I used all camel, taupe and warm brown crystals for the mask, with black around the eye for the Indian smoky-eye effect."

Branches of coral extend from LaCroix's red velvet ribbon-covered mask, which lights up, while Bergdorf Goodman fashion director Linda Fargo's mask of tall red and white plumes was embellished with French playing cards and a veil of crystal chain mail.

"We basically looked for creative designers, artists and people and thought about how they would interpret Venetian masks," said Adellina Wong, chairman of Young Friends of Save Venice. The silent auction prices will start at \$125 and Wong said she hoped the buyers will wear them to the Red and White Masked Ball run by the charity and set for Feb. 15 at the Metropolitan Club in Manhattan.

Faraone Mennella chose not to use crystals in favor of the real thing. Inspired by Sophia Loren in the "Countess From Hong Kong," the mask is covered in 24-karat gold leaf and finished with a gold-set rubellite cabochon and a round-cut diamond.

"Of course, Faraone Mennella's mask had to be precious, and this is incredibly precious," said Faraone Mennella co-designer Amedeo Scognamiglio. "Incidentally, we just came back from Venice and the fascination, the magic and the romanticism of Venice's art, landscape and history are so powerful that it's almost a duty to help preserve it. That's why we decided to support Save Venice."

