

Cleverly constructed: Mateo

BY ISABELLA YAN [SEPTEMBER 9, 2020](#)



This Jamaican-born jeweler draws inspiration from modern art and architecture, using clean lines to create wearable pieces.

The **Mateo** brand is about expressing simplicity and minimalism. Matthew Harris started the company in 2009 in New York City, after discovering the art of jewelry making was his true passion. The son of a seamstress, born and raised in the tropical island of Montego Bay, Jamaica, creativity and an innate sense of style run in his blood. After moving to the US and completing his studies in hospitality management at Southern New Hampshire University, he started a small marketing and sales company to help young designers. “I met this jewelry designer and I started helping her with her marketing. We got her into Barneys and I began to think I could be good at this.”

He spent a lot of time in New York’s jewelry district, asking the right questions, learning the casting process, polishing and stone setting. “I sat on the bench, I burnt myself many times over. I had this real quest and drive to learn more about the art of jewelry,” he shared.

Harris began focusing solely on men’s jewelry before expanding into women’s jewelry in his first capsule collection in 2014. “I’m a man and I understand what a

man wants to wear. As a gay man, I think there is a duality there where I can also design for women. I have five sisters and a mother, they are my eternal muses,” he explains. “For women’s jewelry, I wanted it to be so simple and strong because I believe there is exuberance in simplicity and wearability.”



Duality dangle earrings in 14-karat gold with pearl and malachite.

Time-tested aesthetic

Keeping his aesthetics clean and minimalist, his work is often characterized by a sleek architectural style that draws inspiration from modern artists like Constantin Brancusi and Alexander Calder, and contemporary architects such as Norman Foster. “If an artwork is still appreciated today, it says something about the work they were creating. I hope the work that I make also stands the test of time and people remember it,” he says.

His most iconic creations include his Initial rings, his Mobile earrings and his Rainbow collection. Calder’s influence is noticeable in Mateo’s sculptural mobile earrings that appear to dangle like an art installation, while Foster’s clean lines are reflected in his pearl orbit rings.

Jamaica’s influence also ties into his jewelry in the most subtle ways, showcased in materials like onyx, malachite and gold, the three colors of his native country’s flag.



Secret Initial ring in 14-karat gold with crystal quartz and diamonds.

Staying neutral

Mateo is best known for its use of step cuts and pared-down neutrals. In 2018, the designer launched his iconic Secret Initials collection, featuring a diamond initial nestled underneath a quartz gemstone, resulting in an alluring mirror effect. “I wanted to create high design but also make it affordable,” Harris notes. “There’s something so majestic about the emerald step cut!”

He designs all his pieces with wearability in mind. “Customers want to wear the piece often, so I use soft colors that can blend in with their existing collection. To be subtle is really beautiful,” he says.

Harris is currently working on a new series of Mobile earrings inspired by the graphic compositions of Wassily Kandinsky and also expanding on his Secret Initials collection. “There won’t be any initials underneath this time. Still adopting a clean

shape and signature step cut, we will be using a variety of gemstones like lemon quartz and green amethyst.”



Blizzard Mobile earrings in 14-karat gold with pearls, inspired by Alexander Calder's *Blizzard* mobile



Orbit ring in 14-karat yellow gold with freshwater pearl and diamonds.



Bar earrings in 14-karat gold with onyx and diamonds.

Eve Baroque earrings in 14-karat gold with pearls, inspired by Constantin Brancusi's *The Sleeping Muse*.

