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### Glorious Gold!

01.02.12

2 Culture

Ethical gold - All you have to do is dig a little deeper

I recently met a woman, who, from head to toe, was beautifully dressed - in all but one aspect; she wore no jewellery. I went on to learn that in fact she loved wearing gold pieces, but despite this had sold her collection and taken the decision not to buy more until she could be sure that no harm had come to either the people or the planet on its journey from the mine to a coveted window display. Gold mining, and with it jewellery and jewellers, have become the targets of consumer campaigns that portray gold production as being a dirty, destructive and a socially debilitating industry. The use of cyanide and mercury, the dumping of waste into rivers and oceans and the eviction of indigenous people from their land are practices all associated with gold, tarnishing the luster of a beautiful piece of metal given as a token of love.

More and more consumers want to know the facts about the precious metals in their jewellery: where it comes from, how it is produced and whether gold jewellery can be ethical. In other words, the supply chain is not merely part of the administration but part of the product.

Here are the facts:

**"About 165,000 metric tons of gold is estimated to have been mined in all of human history. A little more than half of that has been mined in the last 50 years."**

About 165,000 metric tons of gold is estimated to have been mined in all of human history. A little more than half of that has been mined in the last 50 years. That is enough gold to fill three and a half Olympic-sized swimming pools and for every person on the planet to have five gold rings each. Because of the high value of gold, few people throw it away and so it is used and recycled for generations. Think of it this way, is not impossible that the gold in your wedding ring was originally mined by the Incas.

Despite the amount of gold above ground, the amount extracted each year (about 2,500 metric tons) continues to grow with over half of that production being used for jewellery in India, China, United States, Middle East and Europe. The rest is held in bank vaults for central bank reserves and investment or used in manufacturing, including electronic goods like cell phones.

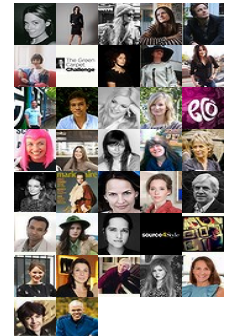
How that gold is extracted can make a significant difference to people's lives, either good or bad. Because most of the world's gold remaining underground is found as tiny particles in hard rock, it takes industrial-sized processes and companies to extract it. Most of the world's gold comes from large mining projects that are highly mechanised, employ few people, and have a physical footprint that can be seen from space. There has been considerable effort in the past few years to make sure these vast industrial projects reduce the harm to the environment as much as possible and that local people benefit from mining more rather than corrupt officials. Industry bodies, such as the [Responsible Jewelry Council](#), have emerged to monitor their practices and provide assurance to retailers and consumers through certification schemes.

Languishing at the other end of the spectrum to the multi-national mining houses are 10 million of some of the poorest people on earth, trying to make a living with picks and pans, digging for 'free gold' that is found in its almost pure form on the beds of African rivers or a few meters beneath the surface of the Amazon forest. Camps of these 'artisanal' miners can draw desperate characters, with scant regard for human rights and whose uncontrolled, unmonitored methods can kill river life with sediment and mercury. [The Fair Labeling Organization](#) has launched a new Fair Trade label for gold that has certified a few of these projects, making sure that they are treating their employees fairly and controlling environmentally harmful processing.



Daniela Colaiaacovo

Daniela Colaiaacovo is a founder and Director of Goldlake Group, an Italian ethical mining company operating in Honduras (Central America). Daniela has 10 years experience in the Business and Corporate Communications industry.



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The Co-opertave Eurocantera

Both these initiatives are a good start to transforming an industry with a spotty reputation. Mining, if done properly, and with the support of a country's government and local communities, can bring much needed sustainable development.

My family started a gold mining business with the goal of demonstrating, both to the industry and consumers, that mining can be ethical and sustainable. Our first mine was opened in Honduras and right from the start was built with the values of our three-generation family business embedded in its design. Minerals are created over millions of years; to lose any through inefficient extraction processes is irresponsible. For the first few years of exploration and planning, we searched for technical and management innovations to improve the operating processes and to make sure we wasted as little as possible. The mine has a zero waste policy, even the gravel with no economic value is donated to build roads to link local communities.

**“Thirty per cent of the gold produced at our Honduras mine comes from independent women-run co-operatives that we help set up, train and supply with machinery.”**

In terms of business economics, sustainability is a fundamental priority, but creating social value is also critical to the continuing success of our company. Our decisions are made with the long-term in mind, because we need time to build relations with communities and incorporate them successfully into the business. To build trust takes more than words; it takes actions. Thirty per cent of the gold produced at our Honduras mine comes from independent women-run co-operatives that we help set up, train and supply with machinery. These are not only our neighbors, but also our business partners. They now have something they did not have before we arrived: a way to make a dignified living. Our method of mining might take a little longer than others, but if it doesn't work for our neighbors, it doesn't work for us.

The historic scars from mining are born by nature, a legacy we do not want to repeat. We use no chemicals in our mine and discharge no processed water into local rivers – it is all recycled. Though trees are lost in extraction, we plant more than are cut down. The result will be a net gain in forest cover by the time we leave.

We know we are not alone in our desire to produce gold in a way that benefits the people who are affected by it the most. Mining sustainably is possible if you give it time, apply humankind's creativity and inventiveness and treat people and nature with respect. Dig a little deeper and you can find ethical gold: Who knew?

#### Comments 2

**JESSICA**

**2 DAYS AGO**

Dirty gold mining is widespread and largely unregulated, often favoring the profits of large corporations over local workers' rights. Poor safety standards in gold mining have led to a high number of fatalities! How can we stop or support this cause????

**ALICIA**

**2 DAYS AGO**

I stopped wearing gold as soon as I discovered what a destructive and dirty industry it was! It was so nice to read this article, it gives me hope and it makes me believe that sooner or later everything will be OK. Thank you for this article! Could we please have more? Many thanks.

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**Rouge Friday**

03.02.12

[Cressida Meale](#)

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