

Yiouri and Ria Augousti.

Power *players*

POWER DESIGNERS



All in the *Family*

ANYONE WHO SAYS YOU CAN'T MIX business with pleasure clearly hasn't met Ria and Yiouri Augousti, the dynamic duo behind R&Y Augousti, a brand known for its Art Deco-inspired home furnishings and handbag collection. The pair met 23 years ago in London—Ria was studying design at the London College of Furniture and Yiouri was a student at the city's Architectural Association—and the chemistry was instant. "We were inseparable from the day we met," Yiouri remembers. The pair married six

months later, marking the beginning of a truly inspired design collaboration.

The idea for R&Y Augousti, which launched in 1990, first came to Ria and Yiouri during a visit to the Philippines to meet Ria's parents. They found the environment an immediate inspiration. "[Our home collection] was a natural evolution," Ria says. "It was the best way to express the natural beauty of the exotic materials we discovered on this trip." Their first collection, called Atlantis, was based on sea creatures. "Starfish and seashells

became mirrors, oysters became tables, sea urchins became trays!" Ria says. An Augousti trademark was also introduced. "We created several patterns using shells and exotic-skin inlays," Ria says of the company's signature inlay technique. The collection was a hit and earned the design team its first major exhibition at L'Eclaireur, a boutique in Paris famous for its avant-garde tastes. The R&Y Augousti label had officially arrived.

Before long, Ria and Yiouri augmented their collection with pashmina, abaca, and raffia, applying their designs to cushions, scarves, and throws. In 2007 they launched their handbag collection. "The handbag line complements the home line because we use the same exotic materials for the handbags," Yiouri says. "Shagreen buckles, horn handles, snakeskin bodies—all have the inspiration of neo-Art Deco."

Ria and Yiouri are currently in the process of adding a selection of carpets to their label as well as expanding into belts and jewelry. But perhaps the addition they are most proud of is their daughter, Kifu, whose designer stirrings surfaced early: Childhood drawings of hers were interpreted for a line of tote bags bearing her name. "The bags were immediately snapped up by Barneys and Calypso," Ria says. "Now that she's older, her interests have changed, but she still loves adding her creative input." Up next from Kifu? "She's currently designing a line of headbands!" Ria says.

Keeping it in the family makes sense, especially given the brand's history. "The most successful pieces we've created were designed by both of us," Yiouri says. Partners in business and in life is the equation Ria and Yiouri credit with making their brand work. "There are endless moments of challenge to our relationship, but we go through each one with great passion," Ria says. Tenacious, talented, and terrific, we say.—R.B.