



## Slow but steady surge in SA

Efforts to boost platinum manufacturing in South Africa are starting to show results with local consumption of the metal surging to over 500kg a year, compared to a meagre 50kg in 1999.

Products are now of such a high standard that certain jewellery manufacturing companies are exporting their ranges.

The turnaround has been largely due to the efforts of some of the major players in the platinum industry, who picked up the growing trend internationally for platinum jewellery. Johnson Matthey, Anglo Platinum and Metal Concentrators simultaneously came to the same conclusion - that there was strong marketing potential for the noble metal in view of this trend. With common purpose they combined forces to encourage its use in South Africa, where jewellers, with few exceptions, had no experience of working in platinum but were accustomed to using white gold.

Their joint plan was to develop and grow the potential use of the metal in the jewellery industry. With the assistance of the Platinum Guild International (PGI) and Mintek, a series of practical platinum training workshops were conducted in Pelindaba and Cape Town. Through these some 600 jewellers were introduced to platinum's potential and were inspired by the possibilities.

### The birth of PlatAfrica

To further channel this enthusiasm the concept of a competition featuring platinum jewellery was mooted by Hilary

and Bernard Stern of Metal Concentrators. With the encouragement of the other interested parties, PlatAfrica was born. The first entries in what was to become an important event for designers in the local jewellery industry were, with few exceptions, unsophisticated to say the least. But year-by-year both the designs and the execution of the pieces developed rapidly to achieve mastery of the medium.

The PlatAfrica competition is now in its sixth year and entries from both students and professional jewellers have increased dramatically in quality and quantity. The presentation of the awards has become an important and glamorous event in the industry's social calendar.

This year's PlatAfrica competition has been fine-tuned to the judging of finished jewels, without the prior selection from submitted sketches. The inspired and inspiring theme is 'Platinum Vows' which opens up wide-ranging possibilities. Its eternal qualities are perfect for symbolising an endless love story, making it the ideal choice for wedding rings and hinting at a "dream bride" concept, among many others.

Completed pieces are due 15 August and

the judging scheduled for September. This year's judges are: Lorraine Efune, Irma Theron, former winner on two successive years Chris Janse Van Rensburg, Alice Weil and one other. The

gala evening at which the winners will be announced will be held on 15 October at Sandton Convention Centre. This year, entries have been restricted to South African residents and

the winning designs will be promoted at roadshows, shopping malls, etc.

Past entrants are enthusiastic about the competition's possibilities and all are planning on entering again. Said Linki Van Zyl, currently a lecturer at the Tswane University of Technology, a former winner in 2000 and 2<sup>nd</sup> overall winner in the professional category in 2004.

"I get extremely excited when working in platinum; it's not only its purity, preciousness and durability which inspires me but also its unique qualities and the fact that it poses more challenges, allowing a designer more possibilities which are not practical in other metals." ■

South Africa is a leading producer of platinum, accounting for 75% of world supplies.

