

The Love Behind the Legend

An Interview with Stanislas de Quercize, President and Chief Executive Officer, Cartier Joailliers, New York



Stanislas de Quercize

EDITORS' NOTE

Prior to assuming his present post in June 2000, de Quercize was president and chief executive officer of Cartier France. He previously directed Alfred Dunhill's international marketing efforts in London and served as head of Montblanc's U.S. division from 1994 to 1997.

COMPANY BRIEF *Founded in 1847 by Louis-François Cartier and headquartered in Paris, Cartier SA was deemed "the jeweler of kings, and the king of jewelers" by no less a connoisseur than King Edward VII. Today, it remains one of the world's most-esteemed luxury brands, designing and manufacturing exclusive collections of fine jewelry, wristwatches, and leather goods, which are distributed worldwide through more than 200 Cartier boutiques and select jewelers and department stores. The firm is a subsidiary of Compagnie Financière Richemont AG. A luxury-goods conglomerate based in Zug, Switzerland, the latter reported sales of \$3.4 billion and net income of \$372 million for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2002.*

How has Cartier been impacted by the events of September 11, 2001?

There's uncertainty, and we're obviously far away from the bubble of the late '90s. Fortunately, this can have a favorable effect for true luxury brands such as Cartier. Customers are more discerning about their purchases and distinguish between the mere logos and the true brands.

Cartier has mythical roots, mythical craftsmanship, and mythical clients. Our roots are mythical, in part, because our story began in 1847, and we've endured crises, wars, recessions, booms, and bubbles. Our long, proud heritage distinguishes us from companies that merely label themselves as "luxury" but don't understand the word's tradition and meaning.

That same mythical heritage can be seen at our Manhattan mansion, which has its own unique and passionate story. Pierre Cartier was in love with the building at 653 Fifth Avenue, and its owner, Mrs. Morton F. Plant, was in love with Cartier jewels. So Pierre exchanged the mansion for a two-tier necklace of 55 and 73 fine pearls. You have to see the mansion to appreciate its beauty. In fact, I'll personally give a tour to any reader of LEADERS who would like to see it in person.

Our mythical craftsmanship is found in our ability to create beautiful, extravagant, world-class jewels and watches by hand, which is rare in this day and age. For example, our Privée Collection is a very exclusive, extraordinary line of watches, all created by hand.

Beyond that, we've had many mythical clients over the years, from Jacqueline Onassis and John F. Kennedy to Elizabeth Taylor and Jean Cocteau; kings, queens, and emperors; the fabled tycoons; and the great self-made men.

Don't you want to increase the availability of the Privée Collection?

Exclusivity is very important to us, so we work with only the very best jewelers. It has always been more important to maintain our standards than to sell a lot of pieces. That philosophy also extends to our client relationships. In some cases, we'll visit clients in hotel rooms or mansions, on private yachts, or at the airport to show them a collection or to do a repair. That's much like the way Louis Cartier serviced the kings and queens in his day.

How do you define your market?

Cartier is for people with a passion for beauty, fantastic craftsmanship, and creativity. If you wear a Cartier necklace, people will recognize it from afar, and they'll know that you're a connoisseur with classic and enduring values. It's also for very generous people who buy Cartier merchandise as a gift of love and friendship.

How do you bridge your sense of tradition with the modern desires of today's customers?

Again, Cartier's tradition is one of innovation – of being daring, bold, and creative. We just launched our new Divan watch. Its design was inspired by pieces in our archives, but it's very bold, very daring, very Cartier. It says something about the wearer's self-assurance and pioneering identity, so not everyone can wear it.

We're also currently displaying the world's most expensive and beautiful necklace – the necklace of the Maharajah of Patiala. It's part of our collection, but it's not for sale. The Maharajah of Patiala, one of the strongest maharajahs in India, came to Paris in 1910, and visited Louis Cartier. He had a trunk filled with diamonds and pearls, which he asked Mr. Cartier to use in the creation of the most beautiful necklace he'd ever produced. Additionally, the Maharajah wanted to use a 345-carat Victoria diamond as the centerpiece.



The Maharajah returned to India, and in 1988, the remains of the necklace were found in an antique store. We bought it, and we've been restoring it for the past five years. The necklace has been displayed across America. We want people to understand its beauty and savor the level of Cartier connoisseurship.

What excited you about the opportunity to lead Cartier in America?

America is the most entrepreneurial country in the world, and Americans are always looking to be astonished. So the chemistry between Cartier and America is perfect because Cartier always offers surprises. There's excitement in wondering what each day will bring. ●

The ceremonial necklace made by Cartier for the Maharajah of Patiala in 1928. Set with 2,930 brilliant-cut diamonds, two rubies, and a 235-carat diamond centerpiece