



Sette Neckwear was founded by Peter Watkins (left) and designed by Robert Jensen who spent nearly 30 years with American neckwear legend Robert Talbott.

EDITORS' NOTE Peter Watkins spent nearly six years working in the White House prior to founding Sette Neckwear. While on official travel in Italy, he came into contact with a personal tie-maker to Italian heads of government. Fluent in Italian, Watkins engaged with the artisans and learned of a higher echelon of neckwear beyond the big-name labels. This inspired him to create the premier neckwear collection for heads of industry, state, and for consumers of beautiful neckwear. Watkins oversees Sette's operations.

COMPANY BRIEF After the Great Depression, the high cost of silk and struggling economy led to cutbacks in quality, and the seven-fold tie, made in the traditional way, disappeared. Sette's (www.setteneckwear.com) world-class designer brought this traditional style back to life in the 1980s and has perfected it anew with the Sette seven-fold. Each necktie is constructed of carefully selected AAA grade Italian silk, incorporating the smallest details in design and texture. Once the silk is woven, the Sette is then folded seven times in a style exclusive to Sette Neckwear; one that uses no liner or filler, only pure Italian silk throughout the necktie.

What did you see in the market that made you feel there was a need for this product?

For me, it began with a personal vision, which was to find a way to get to Italy; to do something enjoyable; and to figure out a way to leverage the network of people I know from my previous career in politics that didn't require competing against them (like in PR or lobbying). In the neckwear business, you would be surprised how many shops in Italy have a photo of a U.S. President or another political leader as a "brand ambassador" of their product. The wonderful people I came to know while working in the White House was the right audience to target and whom I knew would appreciate this product.

So the decision to delve into neckwear came about as an opportunity to fulfill this personal vision. Beyond that, the necktie itself is a power

A Power Accessory

An Interview with
Peter Watkins, Founder, Sette Neckwear

accessory. You are seeing fewer neckties in men's closets and I think men would rather have a small number of very nice ties over a large number of average ones. Also, there will always be occasions where the dress code requires respect and when a necktie is appropriate.

How have you built brand awareness and distribution?

I will pursue traditional means of distribution, but I also want to harness the Web to get in front of our customer base. When it comes to men and luxury goods, too often a customer will find himself in an awkward situation in a store with a salesperson. By using the Web and other social features, we can put ourselves in front of the exact type of customer who would appreciate a \$265 necktie.

In terms of brand awareness, we have had success with high profile public people who have either purchased our neckties or in situations where we've been able to pull some strings to get them to wear them on television or at a public event – it's how I saw some small tie shops in Italy use politicians to demonstrate the 'power' of their neckties.

Also, part of our brand is focused on creating an inherent exclusivity by making a limited quantity of ties and establishing a higher price point not typically seen with new brands.

I've been on so many Web sites for necktie companies or luxury products and they market their brand but don't sell via the site. There is untapped potential in having a well-functioning Web site that can deliver a product directly to the consumer.

At your price point, how much of a niche is your market?

We cater to a market of men who like beautiful neckties made through a painstaking process. Our costs are twice as high as anyone else's because one of our core principles is to not cut corners in how we make our product. We use one piece of beautiful silk, we incorporate the true seven-fold process, and we don't use a cotton or wool liner but rather its own silk for the necessary heft. Another way you can tell our product is handmade is the crocheted bar tack and exterior slip-stitch on the back of the necktie. Beyond that, we don't incorporate an after-market sewn-on label; we actually weave the labels into the silk. In order to remain on that Presidential level we had to do it this way.

That said, we have plans to produce more products, like women's scarves and pocket squares. We'd also like to broaden our reach down the road, and eventually we'll consider a Sette branded tie at a more economic price point. But it can't be a seven-fold.



At this point, purchasing is strictly online. Will there be a retail focus?

There will be. We are in discussion with retail stores and we're still early enough that it hasn't been established yet. A good mix for the company is direct-sell on the Web site, corporate sales for gifting purposes, and a retail component – a 33/33/33 mix.

Is there still an appreciation of the power of a great necktie?

I think so. The tie is always worn when the occasion requires respect. Every industry has brands that cater to niche segments of its customer base. We'll always look for opportunities to provide a good product to somebody. You're seeing less of products driving sales and more of brands driving sales. I want us to return to where the product is something people seek, because a necktie is such a personal accessory.

How much of an emphasis have you put on your back-end systems to make sure your customers are happy with the product?

There's no replacement for the old-fashioned thank you. With every tie ordered on our site, I've written a thank you note that I've included with the product – that personal touch is critical. Each Sette comes with an identity card stating the name and number of the tie in its sequence and you can register it on our site, so when you log into the site to buy another tie, you will be reminded of what you already own.

How limited is production?

In order to differentiate ourselves, we have finite numbers of each design never to be repeated. We have a Classic Sette and a Pure Sette. Sette means "seven" in Italian. The Classic Sette we limit to 21 pieces. The Pure Sette is limited to seven – those cost \$445. The Classics are \$265. This way, you can be confident you won't show up to an event with the same tie as someone else.

It makes a phenomenal gift as a product where you really can't go wrong. It's something nice to have but not at a \$3,000-watch level. It's one reason we've remained conservative in our designs. They won't expire. ●

In order to be a "true seven-fold", the necktie must be made with no liner and encompass nearly a full meter of silk. The silk blade runs the entire length of the tie to ensure the proper amount of heft. (center); Each Sette is presented in either a handcrafted wooden chest or a carefully designed carrying carton. In addition, in order to stay true to the limited edition quality, each Sette comes with an authorization card indicating the name and number of the necktie. (right)