

Bold, Creative Jewelry

An Interview with Paul Lubetsky,
Chief Executive Officer and Owner, Marina B, Windsor Jewelers

EDITORS' NOTE Paul Lubetsky, Founder of Windsor Jewelers, has been in the estate jewelry business for more than 30 years. By combining his knowledge and integrity with his impressive buying power, Lubetsky has become the largest purchaser of brand name jewelry in the world. In 2010, he purchased the celebrated Marina B jewelry brand.



Paul Lubetsky

COMPANY BRIEF Windsor Jewelers (windsorjewelers.com) is one of the leading estate and fine jewelry dealers in the United States. The company maintains a network of offices in New York, London, and Nice, France. The staff includes an international group of appraisers with expertise in gemology, contemporary, antique, and estate jewelry. Windsor's reputation for accuracy and honesty has earned them referrals from both Sotheby's and Christies auction houses, as well as from leading banks and law firms, bringing a continual supply of vintage jewelry to the market.

Marina B (marinab.com) was founded in 1978 by Marina Bulgari, after she worked with her grandfather at his renowned Italian jewelry company, Bulgari. Over the years, Marina B's trend-setting collections have been worn by some of the most sought-after movie stars and notable royalty. Under Marina B's new ownership, the brand continues to evolve by incorporating classic elements into contemporary designs. Giorgio Bulgari, Marina's nephew, is a senior advisor with the company and brings a lot of experience to the industry.

How did your relationship with the Marina B brand come about?

The opportunity came about to buy the excess stock from Marina B, which was at that point owned by someone in Saudi Arabia. We started negotiating and I agreed to buy all of the inventory and the intellectual property.

I didn't realize what a treasure I had. Marina Bulgari was the director of Bulgari throughout the 1970s. She left Bulgari in 1977 and started Marina B, and her designs were cutting-edge. The very wealthy socialites appreciated and bought them – it was very popular in Paris, London, New York, Milan, and Japan.

When we arrived at the warehouse to see what we had really purchased, we found 15,000 original drawings by Marina Bulgari. It was an

artistic archive that was museum-worthy. Each piece was every idea she ever had that she drew, hand-colored – they could all be framed.

We had her creative designs to work with in rebranding the company. In addition, we hired Omar Torres, who is one of the most creative jewelry designers working today. He started interpreting some of Marina B's drawings for the 21st century.

The old designs we've decided to keep true to have gotten rave reviews – people walk into the store amazed by the creativity of it and how bold the jewelry is. Marina designed statement pieces for women to buy for women.

How hard is it to differentiate in the space?

It has to do with the degree of workmanship that you're going to lend yourself to and being true to the design aesthetics of the brand.

When we bring in a new customer and they have to decide one piece that they want to buy, they almost can't do it – they like many pieces but their budget is limited. We're hoping that the market creates new collectors of Marina B, so they remain loyal to the brand and buy it for special occasions.

We want to bring back those loyal customers that Marina B had, and create new ones. One of our goals is to go after the woman who is self-confident, makes a good living, and will buy jewelry for herself. Because if a woman walks into a Marina B store, it will be hard not to find something she really likes – anything she puts on will be different and look great.

Will new pieces down the road be extensions of current collections or will there be new collections?

Both. We're creating new collections; we're doing market studies to see what people like. Usually, Marina B will stay true to having very bold, colorful jewelry that is striking. There is a collection called Atomo, where each piece consists of gold balls that are positioned at specific angles so they reflect each other. Everyone notices this piece of jewelry, so we'll make extensions from that Atomo Collection.

Another collection she did was called Cardan, which is very colorful and the pieces have natural stone balls that are hinges so they move – we have created different versions of it and different colors for spring and fall. But the main thing is to



Creations from the Onda (top left) and Atomo Collections (above)

stay true to her vision of this very bold, exclusive look.

It would seem this is a product you have to touch and feel before purchasing as opposed to buying it online?

Yes. Almost all jewelry looks good in the case, but when Marina made a piece, she would wear it for two weeks – she'd have the people who worked for her and her friends wear it before she allowed it to be sold.

In the same case, with any of the jewelry you try on, it's almost difficult to pick which you like the best because all of it looks good while worn.

Is that creativity still there today?

In most cases, it is a thing of the past. Now, the big term for jewelry is "mass market." You want something that everybody wants and it's all the same, and our niche is to be not mass market but to be very unique, going back to the history of why people bought jewelry.

We want to get back to jewelry that will go with what you're wearing and help you stand out in a crowd.

Are these pieces still made like they were years back?

Yes. When we went to Italy, some of the manufacturers were cheering us on because we were remaking it, as there are other branded companies that go to Italy and give them their exact specifications, which doesn't allow them to have creative input.

We found one of the best manufacturers in Italy to make our Tubogas bracelet, and we were amazed at the quality. It's a snake bracelet around the Marina B logo. I went back to Italy and asked the factory to show me the machine that makes it. He called out a guy named Giuseppe who had a pair of pliers – it takes him 26 hours to make one bracelet.

We went back to that kind of quality. ●