

A Brilliant Beginning



An Interview with Frédéric de Narp,
President and Chief Executive Officer, Harry Winston, Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE Frédéric de Narp assumed his current post at Harry Winston in January of 2010. Prior to this, he served as the President and CEO of Cartier North America. He began his career in luxury retail nearly 20 years ago at Cartier in Japan, and worked in various positions with the company in Tokyo, Switzerland, Italy, and Greece before moving to New York in 2005 to oversee Cartier North America.



Frédéric de Narp

COMPANY BRIEF Harry Winston Diamond Corporation (www.harrywinston.com) is a specialist diamond enterprise with assets in the mining and retail segments of the diamond industry. The company supplies rough diamonds to the global market from its 40 percent ownership interest in the Diavik Diamond Mine. Harry Winston, Inc., the company's luxury arm, is a premier diamond jeweler and luxury watchmaker with salons in key locations including New York, Paris, London, Beijing, Tokyo, and Beverly Hills.

Have you seen a major impact on the business as a result of the economic crisis, and is the market coming back in the luxury segment?

Yes, all luxury brands were more vulnerable during the crisis, and Harry Winston was affected like every other. There is, however, a restored sense of confidence coming back around the world. We see some positive trends and feedback from our clients in America, and business remains strong in Asia, where we're performing very well in Japan and China.

For exceptional products that are extremely unique and rare, and are of the highest quality, like the jewelry and timepieces at Harry Winston, the demand will always be there. Our clients are true connoisseurs who appreciate and recognize the rich heritage and fine quality craftsmanship of our designs.

During these times, where clients are focusing more on the enduring value of pieces, we continue to deliver the very high quality, unique designs that Harry Winston is well known for.

Is this truly a global brand in nature and do you see strong opportunities overseas, maybe more so than in the U.S.?

Harry Winston started the company in the U.S. nearly 80 years ago, so our largest base is concentrated in North America, where we

currently have eight salons. Our next largest market is in Japan, but the rest of the world is yet to be developed for Harry Winston. We have plans to further develop in Europe where we see some strong potential. Over the next few years, we will also look to expand our presence in and around China, where the brand continues to perform well. Harry Winston currently has a network of 20 retail salons worldwide, so there is tremendous opportunity for the brand to grow, while remaining exclusive.

How has the Harry Winston brand been able to maintain much of the tradition and the feel of the pieces, but also create designs that seem to be timeless and exciting for a younger audience?

I think what makes Harry Winston timeless is that our designers continue to take inspiration from our heritage and the DNA of the brand. We constantly look to our archives for inspiration, and continue to manufacture jewelry by hand in the Harry Winston workshop, using the same creative techniques that have been used for more than 80 years. For any brand, though, it is also essential to listen to your clients, and to evolve with their tastes while staying true to the DNA of the brand. I think the New York Collection by Harry Winston is a true example of this balance. Our clients were looking for unique pieces for their everyday wear – a special piece of jewelry between the purchase of their engagement ring and an important anniversary gift. Our design studio answered this through an exceptional collection that not only caters to a range of client tastes, but also captures the remarkable imagery and emotion of New York City – the heart of the Harry Winston brand.

In North America, you offer beautiful boutiques with beautiful products, but many times, there is a feeling of exclusivity about them. Are you focused on promoting a warmer atmosphere at the boutiques that will make them more approachable?

Yes. Exclusivity should not come from salons, but rather from the quality of the craftsmanship, the rarity of the materials, and the level of personalized service given to each client who

visits Harry Winston. We are currently working on a new salon concept that will celebrate the tradition and aesthetics of Harry Winston in a warmer and more welcoming environment. This fall, we will unveil two new salons under this concept: a Las Vegas salon and our renovated flagship salon on Fifth Avenue, designed with architect, William Sofield, who just won the Cooper Hewitt National Design Award.

The brand has been focused on giving back from the beginning. How critical is that to the culture of Harry Winston, and how important is it going forward to maintain that philanthropy focus?

It is absolutely essential for many reasons. Harry Winston, because of the beauty of the diamonds and the high quality of pieces we offer, is trusted by our clients to celebrate the most meaningful moments in their lives. This trust is created through refusing to compromise in whatever we do.

Generosity is embedded in our history and in our culture. Fifty years ago, our founder, Harry Winston, organized an exhibition called the Court of Jewels, where he put together a collection of famous and celebrated gemstones, and charged clients an admission fee to view the exhibition, giving 100 percent of the funds back to charity. As the best and most exclusive jeweler in the world, I think it is our responsibility to carry on this legacy of giving.

When this opportunity came about, did you know right away it was a good fit for you, and as you've gotten to intimately know the brand, has it been what you expected?

I always looked at Harry Winston as a unique beauty: a niche brand that had the highest potential for growth in the world of luxury because of its heritage and commitment to the highest quality in craftsmanship and design. When Bob Gannicott, the Chairman of our board of directors, came to offer me this position, I think it took me no more than five minutes to accept, because Harry Winston is the ultimate expression of creativity, passion, rarity, and luxury, and I knew from the beginning it was the opportunity I had always dreamed of. ●



Top: Iconic Winston Cluster earrings (left and right); Reflection Diamond pendant (center); Bottom: Central Park emerald and diamond ring