



Artistic Creation



An Interview with Dr. Friedrich Wille, President and Chief Executive Officer, FREYWILLE

EDITORS' NOTE Dr. Friedrich Wille was born in Austria in 1940. After training as a lawyer and working as a chartered accountant, he joined the jewelry business of artist Michaela Frey in Vienna in 1970. Following Frey's death in 1980, he took over the company, which he has led to dramatic growth. Dr. Wille continues to be involved in the selection of new collections, motifs, and products.



Dr. Friedrich Wille

COMPANY BRIEF The only company worldwide that makes artistic jewelry with fine decorative art, Austrian jeweler FREYWILLE (www.frey-wille.com) has a team of artists, goldsmiths, and experts of fine enameling. With 90 boutiques in cities including Los Angeles, London, Paris, Istanbul, Moscow, Beijing, and Hong Kong, the company has limited and exclusive production that goes hand in hand with distribution to their own stores and boutiques around the globe. The creation of their jewelry is blended with artistic and handcrafted genius and their success has been rising rapidly in the past few years.

How do you best describe your brand and its target markets?

We are a new luxury brand with the leitmotif "art and jewelry in fire enamel." We create modern jewelry where the core of the value lies in the artistic creation, not in the material used. Nevertheless, we are using the best lasting material – either 18-carat fine gold or gold plated mountings. Jewelry is always very emotional – with our artistic designs even more so – so we want our aficionados to enjoy it for a lifetime.

We have also found a strong demand for the creation of dress watches mirroring the spirit of our jewelry, again using our very special fire enamel technique. And we couldn't refuse to design wonderful matching carrés, gavroches, and shawls.

For me, I wanted to create something for the gentleman that was exclusive: so we created cuff links and belts with beautiful artistic fine enamel decorations. An artistically designed tie also couldn't be lacking in our men's collection.

Recently, we have created beautifully decorated evening bags with precious enamel plates in several designs.

What is the history of FREYWILLE?

The creations of today go back to the revolutionary work of my wife, Simone Grünberger-Wille, who I engaged in the '80s to create completely new

jewelry after the death of Michaela Frey, the founder of the company, in 1980.

Simone Grünberger-Wille brought in several colleagues from the Academy of Applied Arts in Vienna, who joined the team: they developed completely new shapes, found the suppliers, and developed a high artistic level starting with their first collection "Avantgarde", which was entirely geometric.

Since 1981, we have worked as an artistic team without any time pressure, letting the artists take time for contemplation and research, and

encouraging the exchange of thoughts and philosophy. We are working with 18 artists today – five in purely artistic design, three in the creation of new products, and nine in graphics.

Michaela Frey started in 1951 handcrafting decoration and gift items by painting on fire enamel. In the early years, she used only Austrian folkloric designs. Later, due to the influence of London (her husband was English) she started with simple enamel bangles and rings with folkloric and modern designs in the '50s and '60s.

I first joined the company as a chartered accountant and later became a partner because I loved the chance to work internationally and discovered my talent for art and marketing. In the '70s, I developed the European market for the company.

After the death of Michaela Frey, I bought the company and decided to take the full risk of developing completely new jewelry influenced by my humanistic education. In the '90s, we created a beautiful Egyptian pharaonic collection followed by a Greek-Roman collection. The American president of the Claude Monet Foundation asked me to create a collection to pay homage to the artist – it is still very successful. Afterwards, we paid homage to William Morris for the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, as well as Gustav Klimt, Hundertwasser, and Alphonse Mucha.

We create philosophical themes like "Ode to Joy of Life" where we celebrate values that cannot be bought like "Endless Love", "Passion", and "Living Art".

I am always interested in the intellectual life of France, which mirrors my personal style and our artistic future.

What is the profile of your client?

The woman or man who wants to show her or his individuality, taste, culture, exclusivity, high education, love for beauty and art, and aesthetics; someone sure of oneself, not wanting to

be ostentatious and with wealth but rather with an individual taste and a feeling for culture.

As a company with Austrian roots, what is the impact on design and brand culture?

For many centuries, Vienna was a capital of the biggest or second biggest empire of Europe. It attracted many artists to live and work there. Being Viennese, I always wanted to give our creations an Austrian touch. Gustav Klimt, the "pope" of decorative art and Hundertwasser both inspire our artistic team continuously. But coming from a country with a certain history, respect for other cultures and nations is part of our brand's philosophy.

What made you feel it was the right time to open your boutique at 727 Madison Avenue?

To work in the U.S. is a dream for all Europeans, which very often ends badly. So we had to wait until our network of boutiques would allow us to invest in this very challenging market, since we work only with our cash flow.

The financial and economic crisis offered us a unique opportunity to find a beautiful location, which we wouldn't have found in better days.

So far, we are very happy with our New York City team, which is paramount. The location is perfect, the high cultural level of our customers is very motivating, and word of mouth works strongly for us. We are not only selling our most important collections of jewelry, but also dress watches, artistically designed textiles, and the men's collection for the New York City connoisseurs.

The Madison Avenue boutique is also a premier boutique to showcase new products and collections before they are offered worldwide.

Do you have plans to open additional boutiques?

In the U.S., we intend to remain exclusive: we are preparing this year to open a new boutique on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills and we're starting our research in Florida and Texas for new possibilities. In Canada, we want to add a Toronto boutique; we already have one in Vancouver.

Our first boutique in Brazil is opening in the coming months in São Paulo.

What are your key priorities for the future?

Artistic creativity; the development of our worldwide organization on four continents; developing presence in several markets where people seem to be waiting for us; and being a good leader for our people. ●

FREYWILLE Fountain Pen in Gustav Klimt design, 18-carat Cuff links and Diamond Rings in Fine Enamel