

# Tied to the House of Versace

An Interview with Kari A. Allen,  
President, Versace Timepieces-Gevril Group

**EDITORS' NOTE** In March 2012, Kari Allen was appointed President for Versace Watches and Jewelry in the U.S. and the Caribbean. Prior to this, she was Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Damiani USA; Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Boucheron Joaillerie; and Director of Sales for Gucci Timepieces America. Allen is a graduate of Marymount College and member of the Women's Jewelry Association.



Kari A. Allen

**COMPANY BRIEF** Gevril ([www.gevrilgroup.com/about](http://www.gevrilgroup.com/about)) is a Swiss manufacturer of elegant, technologically innovative timepieces. Headquartered just outside metropolitan New York and founded in 1743 by Jacques Gevril (who was appointed watchmaker to the Spanish crown in 1758, thus becoming the first exporter of Swiss watches), the pieces are handmade in Tramelan, Switzerland, by Gevril Horlogerie. Each of the models – most of which are named for well-known Manhattan locations, including Chelsea, Gramercy, Madison, and SoHo – is limited to 100 numbered pieces in 18-karat gold and 500 in stainless steel. Gevril Group is the sole U.S. and Caribbean agent for Versace Watches.

## Versace is a well-known brand but how broad is the awareness of the timepieces?

Versace is a global brand – it's very strong around the world and it's multigenerational. Everyone knows Versace. Gianni Versace did a wonderful job of creating a worldwide brand and Donatella has continued that tradition.

Watches were very important to Gianni. He started having them manufactured in Switzerland because that's where the expertise in watchmaking is, and combined with Italian styling and design, they have become famous around the world.

## How broad is the collection and how has it evolved?

The collections are well balanced – it's truly 50/50, men's and ladies' – and we address many needs of the consumer. The client might want something fashionable and fun to wear on weekends or something more professional for work, so the collections cover a lifestyle for the Versace customer.

## Many think of Versace as high-end niche. How broad is the market for the timepieces?

We start at \$720 with some wonderful designs and we can go all the way up to a Tourbillon at \$80,000. The range is wide so we can address the different needs of the Versace customer for gift-giving, fun on the weekends or for something very serious. Versace is truly a lifestyle brand.

## Are there certain pieces you can highlight that have been a foundation for the brand?

The iconic Reve Collection is very Versace. It has many of the wonderful things that tie it to the House – the classic Greco pattern and some wonderful detailing, and it continues to be a strong piece in the collection.

This year at BaselWorld 2012 Watch and Jewellery Show, we launched many new collections such as the Mystique Chrono and the Mystique Ladies piece, which tie into many of the collections within the House of Versace.

We also have the DV One Cruise, which is quite popular today. For the Krios Collection, they tapped into the archives of Gianni Versace designs. It has been updated and is now a key piece in the collections.

## What investments have you made in customer service?

After-sales service is very important to a brand of this stature. We have a standard to uphold. The Versace customer expects the very best and this is why the Gevril Group was chosen to distribute watches in the U.S. and Caribbean. They have the back-house operations and after-sales service know-how to provide the customer service level that is expected of the brand.

## How broad is distribution in the U.S. and the Caribbean and will it change in terms of the number of locations offering your watches?

Right now, Versace is distributed in Versace boutiques as well as select department stores and independent retailers, and we will continue to look for the very best retail partners to help bring Versace watches to the end consumer.

We are also launching Versus by Versace, which is another brand by the House that is targeted towards a younger, fun customer base, so the target market is 15 to 30 and is more female driven.



## In such a crowded market, how challenging is it to differentiate and is it principally about the Versace name?

It's in how the House of Versace embarks on all new products. In designing a watch, they have to tie it to the brand and everything after that has to go back to the brand identity.

So we follow it from beginning to end, from the design process to manufacturing to the style details and quality of the watch through packaging, customer service, and from the way that the person is selling it behind the counter to the end consumer.

From the first step to the last step, it's about how it's presented and tied to the House.

We're not just selling a watch; we're selling a wonderful Versace timepiece. And we stand out because we are Versace and everything we do from beginning to end is Versace.

## How much time do you spend educating salespeople about brand?

The training is extremely important so they can let their customers know the fashion and luxury spirit of Versace, what the Medusa logo means as well as the Greek key, and point out the unmistakable design details – the things that are distinct to Versace and make that timepiece special.

## How did you end up in this business?

I was a buyer at one point and decided to go to the other side. I was attracted to helping a brand grow and I couldn't be more proud to represent Versace today.

What I like about being on the brand side is it enables me to help more than one retailer. As the buyer, I only helped my own retail organization, but now I help many retail organizations become successful and that is exciting.

As a businessperson, to learn about so many different retail structures and help them grow their businesses is very gratifying.

## What is your focus to ensure the brand remains strong?

I look for great retail partners who understand the brand and will be able to tell the Versace story properly as well as to service the end client. ●



Pieces from the Ladies Vanity Collection (top); and the Unisex Reve Collection (center)