



Pure Brand Heritage

An Interview with Frédéric de Narp, Chief Executive Officer, Bally Group



Frédéric de Narp at the Gentleman's Corner of the flagship Bally shop in London (above) and the exterior of the Bally flagship shop in London (left)

EDITORS' NOTE *Frédéric de Narp has held his current post since November of 2013. Prior to this, he was the President and Chief Executive Officer of Harry Winston and President and Chief Executive Officer of Cartier North America. Earlier, he was Managing Director of Cartier Italy, Retail Director of Cartier Switzerland, and Director, Vice-Director, Boutique Manager, and Sales Associate with Cartier Japan.*

COMPANY BRIEF *Bally (bally.com) sells premium-priced men's and ladies shoes, accessories, and ready-to-wear. Products include briefcases, handbags, neckwear, and scarves, as well as apparel. Bally sells its products at some 150 company-owned stores and 500-plus concessions throughout Asia, Europe, and North America.*

What excited you about joining Bally?

I was excited to join Bally because of the heritage of the brand. I spent 20 years at Cartier and three and a half years at Harry Winston. Both of those brands have an extremely deep and rich heritage. Bally has 163 years of history, having been born in 1851. There is even a Bally Shoe Museum in Switzerland.

I have a passion for taking heritage brands to the next level, and Bally is pure brand heritage. After leading Cartier (North America), famous for being the king of jewelers, and Harry Winston which is known as the king of diamonds, I'm happy to be joining Bally in its position as the king of shoemaking.

Have you been happy with how your people have come onboard and adopted your vision?

Yes. Bally's has an extremely rich heritage, but over the past 10 years, the brand had gone through different owners and investors, and had lost some of its charm.

Today, it's fantastic to be in the hands of a very strong investor and owners who are in it for the long term. This is fantastic because a long-term commitment is necessary to facilitate a brand turn around.

Transformation has been very important. I had to change the brand starting with the people. One of the first decisions I made was to appoint Pablo Coppola as Design Director. Previously, most of the designers working for Bally were freelance.

Pablo was a natural choice for me. Looking at his designs, it was easy to see his passion and the way he was taking the story to heart. It's clear that the brand spoke to him. After spending a couple of hours with him, I asked him to be our full-time Design Director. He said it was his dream. Over the past several months, we have put together an in-house team of 14 designers who are fabulous.

I also went to Asia and hired the ex-CEO of Prada. He had been in Hong Kong for 20 years and is one of the masters of managing brands in Asia. He's now our President for Asia.

Another addition to the team was my Vice President for Marketing and Communications. She came from Galeries Lafayette where she had transformed a group of 66 department stores into the most successful chain in Europe.

I also have many employees who were crucial members of my team at Cartier. Many had followed me to Harry Winston and now to Bally.

So we now have a team of passionate people. We know each other well and comprise a great team of players who are both nice and talented. They are dedicated to working together to achieve a turnaround of this magnificent luxury accessory, shoe, and ready-to-wear brand.

Just one year into this job, we have managed a massive transformation and have put together a team of leaders with a proven track record and experience to continue to make it happen.

Is the focus for Bally to continue to build on shoes or will there be other product extensions?

We currently do as much business in accessories as in shoes. Forty-eight percent of our business is in bags, and small leather goods for both men and women. However, having been conceived as the ultimate luxury shoemaker, shoes still account for approximately half of Bally's business.

When you are capable of designing, crafting, and manufacturing quality shoes, accessories are a natural development. Accessories are at the center of our preservation and of our DNA. We will continue to focus on this in years to come.

Is the brand positioned strictly in the luxury arena and how are you educating the market on the transformation?

Bally is the only Swiss luxury shoe, accessory, and ready-to-wear brand. Brands from Switzerland are generally focused on watchmaking.

With the "Swiss-ness" and the heritage of this provenance comes our precision, quality, innovation, design, and craftsmanship.

Bally was born as a luxury brand but, because of the design and the change of owners over the past 10 years, Bally might have lost a bit of its positioning. If I look at the 163 years of heritage and the more than 35,000 shoes we have in our archives, they are remarkably done with the ultimate craftsmanship. We are extremely proud of this.

We recently launched the first Bally flagship store to be built in 20 years. This London store is an entire *maison* with a corner location on New Bond Street. It was designed by David Chipperfield Architects as a new concept store for the brand.

The transformation of our products started early in 2014 with new collections and now we have an identity in terms of store look, design, and experience.

I've also made sure we have some commercial lines, but I have pushed the boundaries of the brand exactly as I did at Cartier and at Harry Winston. It is our goal to fulfill dreams and present the world with a series of extraordinarily well-crafted products.

Now that we have spread the message that Bally is the most important luxury shoemaker in the world, I want to offer to the world the most important service: shoemaking and shoe services.

With our new flagship in London, we have launched made-to-order service for the first time. The made-to-order service is one where we fulfill special bespoke shoe orders as well as offering a made-to-color service where we have shoe artisans creating the color of the shoe in front of your eyes at the store. Not only can you choose the color but you can choose the hues and identity of the shades for yourself.

We recently launched a new Goodyear Construction project. The finished shoe is extremely flexible and comfortable as a result. We have achieved the lightest Goodyear Construction ever created on this planet. It offers the wearer an incredibly sophisticated shoe that is flexible, light, and comfortable while also isolating the body from the shocks of daily activities.

At Bally, we are constantly looking to innovate but equally focused on taking our heritage from the past and bringing it into the future. ●