




---

# THE FAMILY JEWELS

*Once upon a time the retail business was all about family – remember Garlicks, Anstey’s or John Orr’s? In jewellery, family still rules. Some kingpins talk to us about the past and how to stay on top of the game. By Lisa Templeton*

---

**DIAMONDS MAY BE A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND, BUT TO MANY A JEWELLER THE RELATIONSHIP** with these sparkling little lumps of carbon is ever so much closer. For these jewellers, for whom diamonds are the rocks upon which their family fortunes were built, the love of diamonds runs in their blood.

Just ask David Ungar, of David Ungar London, a fifth-generation jeweller. I have caught him in Johannesburg just before he jets off to London to visit the family-owned boutique there. Both a jewellery designer and large-scale manufacturer, David's life is spent on international flights between stores, his workshop, head office and trade fairs, and he loves every second of it.

'Jewellery gives one so much scope to be creative and I have loved it for as long as I can remember.'

Perhaps this is no surprise, given that his great-great-grandfather first ventured into jewellery creation a century and a half ago in his home town of Munkacs in Czechoslovakia, and his great-grandfather, grandfather and father before him dedicated their working lives to fulfilling the dream of becoming distinguished and celebrated jewellers.

By the age of 16, David was committed to following in the family footsteps. After a five-year apprenticeship in Johannesburg he spent time in a diamond factory in Antwerp, Belgium, and in Italy and London where he soaked up all he could of the intricacies of the jewellery business.

'It has now been 35 years since I first ventured into jewellery and I have sold more than 10 million articles of gold jewellery priced from R100 to half a million rand.'

Today, as well as supervising David Ungar London, which focuses on distributing his luxurious and opulent David Ungar Signature Brand globally, he is also managing director of Daberon Manufacturers, which produces jewellery for the local and export mass markets.

He is also involved in the family-owned cyber boutiques: [www.dulondon.com](http://www.dulondon.com), which showcases David Ungar luxury products; [www.ungarandungar.com](http://www.ungarandungar.com), offering vintage-style diamond jewellery; and [fruittijewels.com](http://fruittijewels.com), which sells handcrafted 'must-have cocktail jewellery' with its bold coloured gemstones in 18 carat gold, as well as other designer charms and trinkets.

'My life is about jewellery – and my whole family is involved in the business, including both my brothers, Bernard and Roland.'

Despite his intense involvement in the business side of the industry, David remains passionate about design and is actively involved in the manufacture of his David Ungar range, happy to roll up his sleeves and join the 40 artisans in his Johannesburg workshop to toil side-by-side in the creation of quality jewellery. And quality to David means using flawless gemstones and hand-executed finishes.

In the recent tough economic climate it is the unique handcrafted pieces that sell, while the commercial side has struggled, David says.

So what is one of his proudest moments?

'Well, I did create a ring for a well-known American actress,' he says warmly. 'I'd rather not name her, suffice to say that she is a Desperate Housewife. But everything I do, I am extremely passionate about.'

And what should we be buying?

'At the moment bold pieces are in vogue, with a lot of show, and coloured gems are very big globally, especially in earrings and rings, and for men designer cufflinks are making a major comeback.'

It is all about a return to colour, particularly with colourful gems like turquoise or amethyst set in yellow gold, agrees Christopher Greig, a fourth-generation jeweller whose great-grandfather, Charles, first ventured out from the Scottish mists of Aberdeen to seek his fortune in 1894. It was on board a ship that he identified a gap in the whirlwind that was the Johannesburg gold rush for wall clocks for mines, and so set his future family on to the path of watch-making and, ultimately, jewellery.



Previous page: Pearl and diamond neckpiece by Charles Greig, bracelet and rings by David Ungar

Above: White and black diamond rings by Olga Goodman

Overleaf: Neckpiece and earrings by Charles Greig

## *'Designer cufflinks are making a major comeback'*

Today his three great-grandsons at Charles Greig, Christopher, Donald and Richard, 'like to think of ourselves as trendsetters'.

And the trends today are shifting away from the white gold and platinum of the past decade back towards yellow gold.

'Interestingly, pink gold is also one of the biggest trends,' says Chris. 'Pink gold was last seen in the Victorian times, particularly in England where it was used in ladies' jewellery and men's bow watches. A diamond set in pink gold will take up the wonderful warm hue of the metal.'

Black, it would seem, is never out of favour, with black diamonds and gemstones such as onyx and spinel and metals like black rhodium still in fashion, especially when contrasted with white diamonds.



And pearls, which were last seen around the elegant neck of Princess Diana, are showing a classic and gracious revival in Europe.

Speaking from the stately Charles Greig signature store in Hyde Park Corner, Johannesburg, where a portrait of great-grandfather Charles graces the walls, Christopher remembers how as a boy of six or seven it was always a big treat to visit his father David's store.

'I loved being involved in all aspects of the business, and I was designing pieces by the age of six or seven which we sold through the store.'

If you ask Christopher for his highlights over the decades of being in the business, one thing he remembers with great warmth is winning a window display competition in 1971, at the age of 12, when he created a window display of historical Johannesburg, complete with ox wagons and horse carriages.

Later creations that stand out include a military-style brooch and a collection of mineral specimens destined for the Queen of England; an intricate, delicate tiara which he designed as a bridal piece

for the four daughters of a diamond magnate by winding a feminine filigree of forget-me-knot flowers and leaves in platinum, dotted with 3 000 diamonds; and lastly a very grand emerald and diamond necklace and drop earrings created for a Middle Eastern royal family using Columbian emeralds the size of matchboxes (pictured left).

'It was an unbelievably extravagant piece, probably one of the most opulent pieces ever made.'

Of course there are other, humorous things that spring to mind after so long in the trade, like the woman who dropped her kilt in the shop when she heard they needed kilts for a window display, or the gentleman who ordered two Christmas gifts, a modest one for his ex-wife, and a rather more generous one for his much younger paramour, only to muddle the gifts up, giving the diamond chandelier earrings to the outgoing woman and the ballpoint pen to the lover. After some strife, he ended up buying a second pair of earrings.

Talking to Christopher, the passion he has for the business, and for his family's established role in the market, is clear.

'I see the same passion in my daughters,' he says with a smile.

And who can blame Annabel, 13, and Sophie, 10, for showing enthusiasm for the fact that their father sells things that sparkle.

'I have no doubt there will be a fifth generation in the business as my brothers each have two children too, and I would be thrilled. After four generations it would be a great shame to see the whole legacy come to an end.'

Christopher gets great joy out of working with his family (which also includes his uncle, who is financial director) and appreciates the trust that comes with it.

Another jeweller who is delighted her son has joined the family business is Olga Goodman of the Olga Jewellery Design Studio in the V&A Waterfront, who is very hands-on in both the design and the retail side of her business, calling goodbye to customers by name as we start the interview.

Not only is she married to Colin Goodman, a jewellery wholesaler who runs the admin side of her business, but her 26-year-old son, Warren, also joined the business three years ago as a gemologist.

'It is the greatest joy to have your child in your business,' says the bubbly Olga. 'I just feel so lucky to have him to lean on and to trust, and to pass on my knowledge, which he soaks up like a sponge.'

'My children have grown up with jewellery talk at the dinner table so they have always been involved.'

And there must have been some stories to tell at that dinner table – during her years as a jeweller, Olga has created works for Hillary Clinton (braving security at the Clintons' Waterfront hotel to deliver the piece to her daughter, Chelsea), U2 frontman Bono, Celine Dion (who sat in her dressing gown at breakfast while Olga presented her piece) and Oscar-winning actor Jeff Bridges.

She has also created an engagement ring from lunar rock. 'It was very valuable, but that poor woman – it looked like nothing! But it meant an awful lot to her fiancé.'


While her older son, Gavin, 30, has gone into cinematography, charismatic Warren went into advertising but missed interaction with people, so joined Olga in the business.

He has brought a fresh energy that customers love and he is looking at creating a website for the sale of diamonds.

So, will he take over the business one day?

'I would love him to take over when the day finally comes that I step back, but who knows when that will be. I love to be busy all the time and I work six full days a week. I have taken up oil painting, but I can't see myself doing that full-time yet!'

For Olga, jewellery is stimulating. It's an adrenalin rush and it enables her to mix with incredible people, some of whom become friends along the way.

'It is the ultimate joy to see people's pleasure at something you've created.' 

**David Ungar, Charles Greig and Olga Jewellery all accept Diners Club Card.**