



Arm party: The Brilliant Flying Tourbillon Arlequino, Brilliant Full Baguette Rainbow and Brilliant Rainbow are masterpieces of gem-setting artistry and boast carat after carat of multi-coloured sapphires and diamonds.

T

ORIGINS

MAN OF THE HOUR

AS JACOB & CO. CELEBRATES THREE DECADES, FOUNDER JACOB ARABO CHATS WITH *SLT* ON ONE IN A MILLION GEMS, HIS PERSONAL MOTTO AND THE LAUNCH OF HIS SECOND FLAGSHIP STORE IN DUBAI.

By Julia Seidl

J

In 1663, legendary gem merchant Jean-Baptiste Tavernier travelled to the depths of India in search of precious stones to dazzle the French court and in particular, King Louis XIV. No ordinary diamond would do. He needed a rock that would blind His Majesty with its sparkle and lead to unadulterated gasps of admiration. His efforts were rewarded with the discovery of diamonds of such extraordinary transparency that, upon viewing the stones' diaphanous quality, the King himself called them "pools of crystal water." These sparklers, brought to western Europe by Mr. Tavernier from the fortified city of Golconda, are characterised by their water-clear appearance and are often classified as whiter than white, earning them a Type IIa designation, a grade awarded to less than 2% of all diamonds. To say that a Golconda diamond is rare is an understatement. ▶



Jacob & Co. founder Jacob Arabo

Legend has it that the Koh-i-Noor and Hope Diamond both came from the mines of Golconda and now, several centuries later, jeweller Jacob Arabo has in his possession The Eye of Golconda, a 40ct pear-shaped D-internally flawless diamond. "It is one in several millions," says the founder and chairman of Jacob & Co. "It is an absolutely extraordinary gem."

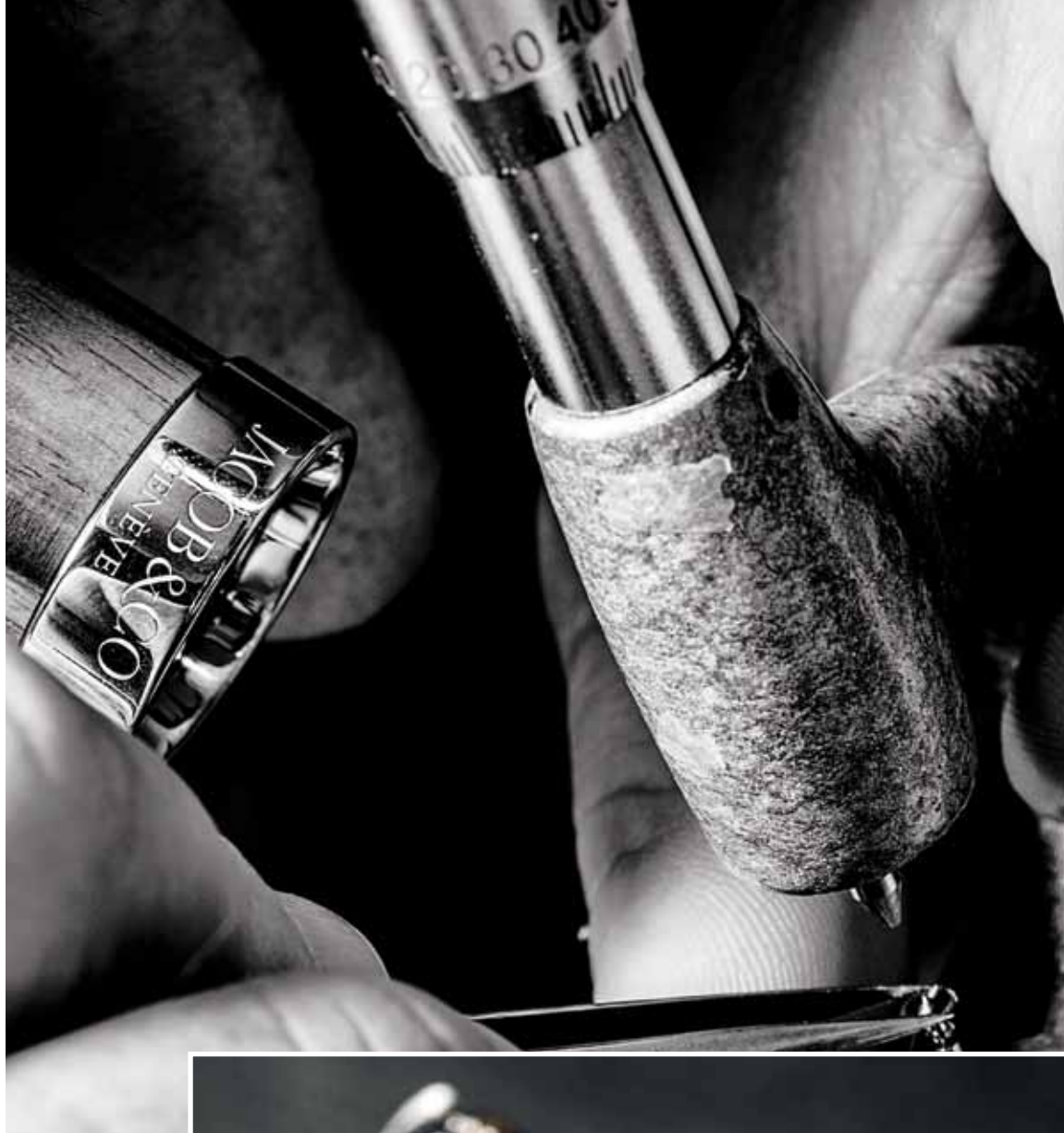
Like his newly acquired gem, Jacob himself is somewhat of a legend. You may know him better as Jacob the Jeweller, a name bestowed upon him by the hip hop community who were early adopters of his pieces and who showed their gratitude by name dropping his moniker into their beats. Kanye West, Jay-Z and 50 Cent are just a handful of rappers who have showered the jeweller with lyrical love, resulting in a grand total of almost 70 musical mentions. But ever the diplomat, Jacob won't play favourites and reveal the rhyme he likes best. "It has been so great having the support from my musical clients in this way, but to be completely honest, I cannot isolate one in particular."

It's been over two decades since Jacob became part of hip-hop history and exactly 30 years since he launched his eponymous jewellery brand. His foray and subsequent conquering of both the gem and watch world are the

"I strive to surprise my clients each year with innovative pieces unlike anything else in the market. Whilst there are still ideas out there, there is still work to be done."

makings of a great American success story. At 14, he immigrated to the United States from Uzbekistan (once a stop on the Silk Road trading route). Two years later, he began working as a jeweller's apprentice and by 17 he had opened up a workshop of his own. Using the profits he earned from manufacturing pieces for other brands, Jacob began creating his own collection. His unique designs and a burgeoning demand for his jewels meant he soon outgrew his space and so the designer opened up his first store in New York City. His flagship boutique is located just shy of the Upper East Side, smack dab between two of the city's swankiest streets, Madison and Park Avenue. When asked about undertaking such a gamble at such a young age, Jacob is matter of fact. "Every entrepreneur has to be a risk-taker."

This risk-taking nature has come in handy on the design front for Jacob, who says he lives by the motto, "the sky is not the limit." And it's also probably the secret sauce that has led celebrities and fashion industry types (Madonna, David Beckham, Beyonce and Dolce & Gabbana have all worked with the designer) to choose his pieces over more conservative brands. After all, what good is a gem if it's not turning heads?



From top: Inside Jacob & Co's Geneva workshop, which opened in 2012; Interior workings of the Epic SF24; Launched in 2014, the Astronomia Tourbillon is Jacob & Co's most ambitious timepiece.



His passport is stamped with custom declarations from some of the most exotic places in the world, thanks to his sourcing trips to find the sparkliest baubles. “Different soils are rich with different types of gems,” says Jacob. “For example, sapphires and rubies are sourced from Burma which is the finest place on earth to find these gems whilst Paraiba tourmaline are sourced from Brazil and colour diamonds from South Africa and Australia.” Coloured gemstones are sort of a specialty for the jeweller. The pink diamond Jacob & Co. ring given to Victoria Beckham by her husband David has reportedly increased so much in value, she no longer wears it in public.

The designer took a leap again when he introduced watches into his collection in 2001. Jacob’s first watch was named Angel (after his wife Angela) and he only produced 100 of them. Within one week, they were sold out. Clearly, customers were eager to decorate their wrists with a Jacob. With his celebrity clients and their jet-setting ways in mind, he created his Five Time Zone watch. It features four fixed time zones – New York, LA, Tokyo and Paris – with the fifth dial set to the wearer’s choice. In signature Jacob fashion, it wasn’t short on sparkle. Covered with 239 diamonds and weighing over 260 carats, it took over two years to make and was quickly snapped up by its target market (Elton John once ordered 22 as gifts). Despite the flash, it’s a throwback to a watch his father gave him on his 13th birthday that featured a map of the world.

When he first entered the watch game over a decade ago, Jacob has admitted he faced resistance from factories in Switzerland who were hesitant to work with a brand that wasn’t of European origin. But in typical Jacob fashion, he barrelled through, experimenting not only with design but also with a timepiece’s complications, creating groundbreaking pieces that earned the respect of the industry and continue to draw headlines at Baselworld. From his Astronomia Tourbillon (whose bubble casing made out of a single sapphire crystal allows for an unhindered view of every element of the watch’s mechanics) to his Billionaire (an \$18 Million stunner that is covered in 260 carats of emerald-cut diamonds), his timepieces test the limits of horology. Case in point – the the Astronomia Sky that launched this year at Basel. It introduced a never-before-seen complication – a three-dimensional sidereal display with an oval sky indicator and a 24-hour day and night display.

30 years of innovation and risk-taking has brought the brand and the man to Dubai to launch his first store in the Middle East. It’s their second flagship store after their boutique in New York City and they’ve chosen the tony Level One of the Mall of the Emirates to make



their mark. “Dubai is a global destination with a deep focus on innovation and luxury,” says Jacob. “The UAE clientele is looking for a sophisticated and trendy design with the highest quality.” Clients looking for a little special something will find themselves lingering in the luxurious boutique thanks to its luxe Art Deco décor – think lacquered herringbone wood floors, quilted wall panels and silken fabrics. A store in Dubai is part of Jacob & Co.’s global strategy and it’s also a pretty good way to celebrate a 30th anniversary. But Jacob is most looking forward to celebrating his success a little closer to home. “My family is incredibly important to me, so an experience with my family is the greatest gift I could receive when celebrating any sort of occasion!”

JACOB’S JEWELS

