



Photo by Gideon Levin

# Gerard Djaoui

by Aliza Davidovit gem of a man

**W**ith his sophisticated French accent, striking looks and aristocratic comportment, it is hard to imagine who could better serve as Cartier International's director than the one-of-a-kind Gerard Djaoui, who fittingly sits at the head of the legendary company that has serviced and jeweled kings and queens and adorned aristocrats across the world.

Cartier was founded in 1847 by Louis Francois Cartier in a small jewelry workshop in Paris, France. During the reign of Napoleon III, fashion, flair and fun returned to Paris. The times encouraged the expansion of the business and eventually, over three generations of Cartier descendants, they developed a very prestigious clientele. The Prince of Wales once described Cartier as "Jewelers to kings, and the king of jewelers." Upon King Edward VII's coronation, 27 tiaras were ordered from Cartier. The company was eventually honored with royal warrants from the courts of England, Spain, Portugal, Russia, Siam, Greece, Serbia and Belgium, among others.

# Cartier designs, manufacturers and distributes all of its own products, such as jewelry, watches, eyewear, fragrances, writing instruments, lighters, leather goods, scarves and crystal.

The enterprise that had started as a little workshop in France over 156 years ago is today one of the world's leading luxury goods companies with a global network of over 200 Cartier stores and 10,000 authorized dealers in 123 countries. In the United States alone there are 28 stores.

Cartier designs, manufacturers and distributes all of its own products, such as jewelry, watches, eyewear, fragrances, writing instruments, lighters, leather goods, scarves and crystal. But great products don't create themselves, and prestigious companies such as Cartier don't run on autopilot. Cartier's continuity of fabulous products can be attributed to the talented great men and minds behind the scenes. Djaoui, who is in charge of Cartier subsidiaries worldwide, is one such man who rose through the company ranks all the way from export assistant to the impressive title he holds today.

**G**erard Djaoui was born in Algeria on July 23, 1951. When he was 10, he and his family were forced to leave when Moslem rebels liberated Algeria from France. He, his parents and younger brother were among the 250,000 Jewish refugees who flocked to France when they were expelled from the Islamic country. They left everything behind, including his father's successful hotel business. But Djaoui had no remorse about leaving Algeria, a country where he grew up witnessing constant acts of terror by Muslim extremists.

Upon their arrival in France, the Djaoui family lived in Nice. The mild-



**Cartier Limited Edition "Must Essentials."**

ness of the climate, the diversity of the landscapes, the richness of the flora, and the beauty of the great Mediterranean Sea soon exerted their mystique upon the young boy. He was excited to make new friends and engaged in lots of sports, such as judo, soccer and rugby. He eventually joined the Jewish boy scouts, Eclaireurs Israelites de France, where his head counselor at the time was none other than Joseph Sitruk, today the Chief Rabbi of France.

Although Djaoui was raised in a traditional home, which means Friday night *kiddush* and then a movie, the Jewish leaders always tried to make the boy more religious. But if their teachings didn't take with Djaoui himself,

they would influence his young son a generation later.

In 1969, Djaoui completed his Bachelor's degree at the University of Nice, where he graduated with distinction. He then pursued a marketing degree at Ecole des Cadres et des Affaires, where he graduated with honors, and was then off to Paris to earn a Master's in Business Administration from Paris IX Dauphine University.

In 1974, after completing his university studies at the age of 23, he joined Cartier as an assistant to the export manager who was in charge of the Middle East, Africa and Europe. There he began to climb the corporate ladder. Upon one special rung, he met his wife,

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Corinne, who was in charge of Cartier's communications division. By 1980, Djaoui and his wife—who converted to Judaism—and their 6 month-old son were transferred to Toronto, Canada, where Djaoui served as President of Les Must de Cartier Canada.

But Cartier's international demands would not let them remain settled in Canada for long. After six years of hard work, Djaoui and his family, which had since increased by one with the birth of their daughter Deborah, moved from Toronto to Hong Kong, where he assumed the position of Managing Director of the Far East.

Djaoui says that when he got to Asia he sought out the Jewish community. Although he and his wife were liberal Reform Jews and members of the Holy Blossom Temple in Canada, they became very attracted to the Lubavitch community in Hong Kong. "They were very active there and the Lubavitch emissary, Rabbi Mordechai Avtzon, was full of charisma," Djaoui reflects.

He and his family began attending Chabad services and events on a regular basis. Djaoui recounts that it was very easy to live a Jewish life in Hong Kong because there are several kosher stores with imports from abroad and there is no antisemitism.

But the Djaoui family's Jewish life really made an about face when their son, David, turned 11 and began speaking about his bar mitzvah plans. The young boy insisted on having his bar mitzvah in France in an Orthodox synagogue. That was not a possibility because Djaoui's wife had undergone a Reform conversion, affecting the status of her children under



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Orthodox *halachic* standards. No Orthodox *shul* would host such a bar mitzvah on their premises. But the young lad would not be swayed. He decided that if he himself had to convert according to Orthodox standards in order to have his bar mitzvah where he chose, he would—and indeed he did. The young boy studied for two years and was converted according to *halacha* by the Orthodox Rabbinate of France. Djaoui's son became bar mitzvah in the same Orthodox *shul* in Nice that Djaoui himself had been bar mitzvahed. Today, the 23-year-old David is studying to become a lawyer at the Sorbonne and Deborah, 19, is planning on becoming a fashion designer. David remains Orthodox, wears *tzitzit*, and plays electric guitar.

But David was not the only one to learn from Lubavitch. Djaoui himself learned that it is possible to be a practicing Jew without making an upheaval of

one's whole lifestyle. But both he and his wife did make major changes to accommodate their son's religious convictions. With blow-torches in hand, Lubavitch rabbis came to their home and "koshered" their kitchen. The compliant father admits that at first he was a little scared. He wasn't used to having two sets of dishes and worrying about buying kosher food. But his fears quickly subsided and he was proud of their new commitment. "The only regret I have is that there are no good kosher cheeses," Djaoui confesses. "When in France, that is such a pity." Now the family lives a life of *Shabbat* and *yom tov* observance and loves it.

But if Djaoui finds that he is committed to his Jewish tradition, he is equally committed to the traditions of the Cartier company that has given him the chance to travel the globe and meet with the world's elite. He makes certain that the company continues its tradition of fine quality and maintains the highest standards and first-class service that it has always provided to its customers. He is still constantly traveling—which he loves to do—and is in touch with retailers around the world to make sure that Cartier continues to understand the nature and needs of its customers. Cartier also makes a point of giving back to the international community and continually sponsors charitable and worthwhile causes.

Gerard Djaoui has worked for Cartier for almost 30 years. He has watched it grow and helped it grow with respect and integrity. As the main man behind the gems and jewels of Cartier, Djaoui is precious proof that if it glitters, it must be gold.

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