

At the Heart of Cartier

Nicholas Foulkes lays bare the Anglophile soul of a French institution

⌚ If you happen to own a large country house and a good shoot, spend large amounts of time with the Queen, be a former ruler of a European country or spend upwards of \$1 million on individual pieces of jewellery, then the chances are that you are you know Arnaud Bamberger quite well. To the rest of us he is “Mr Cartier”, the impossibly French Anglophile with the rich French accent that makes Maurice Chevalier sound like Ray Winstone, the craggily attractive features that make women swoon, the immaculate wardrobe of English clothes and the knack for being in the right place at the right time. For the last decade – and more – that place has been at the top of Cartier in the UK.

With his genteelly frayed, shabbily chic shirt and tie, he actually manages to look more English than most English people. “I am very happy to live here and I have made the decision to stay in this country. My children have been brought up as little English people and it looks like I am one of the rare Frogs to have been adopted by the Rosbif.”

“I enjoy going to the country. I am not fishing yet but I am shooting, and it is difficult not to enjoy life in the country in those beautiful houses. I shoot with Lord March at Goodwood, at Blenheim with the Duke of Marlborough, with Rocco Forte and with Vivien Duffield.”



"I am very lucky to be included in this kind of life, and that helps my business. It is not uncommon that people call me to say, for example, that they have forgotten their wedding anniversary and that they want to spend so many hundreds of thousands of pounds, and ask whether I can help." Of course, at times like this Mr Cartier saves the day. Seeing Arnaud in full sales mode, explaining just why \$1 million for a string of perfectly matched Tahitian pearls really is a bargain, is one of the wonders of a retail world that is rapidly becoming anonymous and ordinary.

Personality

Arnaud is a true character and, in an increasingly faceless world of brand managers and marketing geeks, that is an entirely good thing. Rather than being a dry luxury goods apparatchik who counts the numbers and can read a spreadsheet in the dark while blindfolded, Arnaud is the kind of man who will happily tell you that he was on a yacht with the King of Greece last summer, when His Majesty the King of the Hellenes noticed Arnaud's two-time-zone Cartier from the Collection Privée and placed an order for one there and then on the deck. I have come to enjoy these little glimpses into the charmed life of Mr Cartier.

His office is strewn with photographs showing him with various members of the Royal Family, but at the moment it is not the photographs in his charming Troisième Empire-style office



that are demanding his attention – but their frames. He has just started a collection of photograph frames decorated with regimental insignia; some are in gold, some silver, some pigskin, some enamelled, and all warrant a few words of explanation from Arnaud.

With the classic Aston Martin for weekends, the bespoke luggage from Dunhill to put in it, the long-wheelbase black Jaguar and driver for the commute from the Belgravia townhouse – which he shares with his beautiful art historian wife and children – to his office on Bond Street, and the invitations to every major stately home from Buckingham Palace down stacking up on the mantel, Arnaud Bamberger leads the sort of life that all but the richest and best connected of his customers might envy.

"I am 57 but I don't look 57," he laughs. "I started at Cartier 27 years ago, when I was hired as the export director." Back in the mid-'70s, Cartier had just begun their long climb from the position of ossified old-fashioned jeweller. The first "Must" de Cartier boutique had opened in Biarritz in 1973. It captured the spirit of the age admirably and Arnaud was hired a couple of years later to bring Cartier to a worldwide audience, acting as a global ambassador for the brand.

"It was small but fun," he says of the Cartier of those far-off days of flares and showrooms that looked like discotheques.

"It was very lively. We were a bunch of people who were working and playing very hard, and we were opening Cartier up to the world during a fantastic epoch. I travelled the globe, then moved into New York where I opened 15 stores in the US in 8 years, and then moved back to Paris to the HQ where I was appointed worldwide retail director. In those days I was in charge of 175 stores across the world, and that is when I remarried and had a baby girl and decided that it would be good for me to have a job that would not give me so much travelling."

"I came here in 1992. It was a bit dusty and not very glamorous, although there were some very good things being put together like the polo," says Arnaud of Cartier in London when he arrived. "There was a lack of sexiness and a lack of a link between Cartier the jeweller and the local social class. It was a retailer but without the sense of anybody behind it."

However, with the arrival of Arnaud, that was to change. The remarkable thing about Arnaud is that he lives the life; he buys into the sort of internationally glamorous notionally British way of life that most of us only know from novels and Hollywood films. But as Oscar Wilde pointed out, one should "never speak disrespectfully of Society," for the obvious reason that "only people who can't get into it do that." And Arnaud is now such an integrated part of society that you will never hear him utter a bad word about Society with a capital S. He also understands another Wildean rule: "To get into the best society, nowadays, one has either to feed people, amuse people or shock people – that is all!" Arnaud is far too well behaved to ever set out to shock anyone intentionally, but anyone who has ever been on the receiving end of one his legendary lunches will be fully aware that he knows how to feed and amuse his guests.

Glamour

"I wanted to change this image of Cartier, to make it more glamorous, to associate Cartier with the social life where it belongs, and to associate the name of Cartier with the best things in this country. I realised that there were a few niches in this country, one being gardening and flowers, hence the reason for doing something linked with the Chelsea Flower Show. I did my Cartier garden with Clifton nursery, owned by Lord Rothschild. We won gold medals several times in a row," he says, adding with a cunning smile, "which was a perfect excuse for holding a big dinner party on that day of the opening of the flower show." People would come to the tent at the Physic Garden, where we would celebrate the opening of the show, and this dinner, which was set up 9 years ago, has become so successful that it has



Collection Privée, Cartier Tortue Minute Repeater.



Monica Bellucci, photographed by David Bailey, wearing Cartier's Declaration in white gold with pavé diamonds.



come to be seen as the beginning of the social season in England."

"Another niche is the horse racing," which Arnaud describes as "typical of the English people." For him, the Cartier Racing Awards is the equine equivalent of the Oscars, but is better in that his good friend the Queen allowed him to come to Buckingham Palace to present her with an award recognising her contribution to the turf. The Los Angeles setting of the Oscars seems rather dowdy in comparison.

If Arnaud can open the summer season with a Cartier flower show dinner, then he can bring the summer season to a close each year with the Cartier International Polo event at Windsor, which is no longer a merely British day out but an event of international sporting and social significance that is marked in diaries everywhere from Palm Beach to Portofino.

The next chapter

Now in his late fifties, a time when a man should be allowed to get on with accepting invi-

tations to go shooting and sailing with his smart friends whilst allowing a little time left over to concentrate on building up his collection of vintage photo frames, Arnaud has been given overall control of the Richemont Group's watch brands in the UK market. The company is the luxury goods behemoth that owns Cartier, Panerai, Vacheron Constantin, IWC, Jaeger LeCoultre and Baume et Mercier, and they want Arnaud to work the same sort of magic that he has with Cartier.

He tries and almost succeeds in being modest when talking about his new role. "What I can say is that I hope my experience in this market will enable me to be able to contribute something to the other brands of our portfolio and find out the niches and special things that we could do to develop awareness, whilst keeping each individual brand's identity separate and not mixing them together."

He is particularly interested in developing the potential of Vacheron Constantin. "Vacheron are small but are going to grow," he says confidently

of the brand to which he applies the adjective *intellectual*. "They will always have a limited distribution; they need a certain level of exclusivity and we can't be everywhere. I don't want to do what Patek have been doing; I want to do less than Patek and specifically put Vacheron Constantin in a few accounts. We will start to advertise and to promote the oldest factory of watches in the world and try and put them in front of those people who value high quality. I have no complex about Patek," he says of Vacheron's rival at the top end of the market. "We are of the same quality. I am not saying either are better or worse, they are at least as good as each other."

Arnaud's philosophy of tightly managing distribution extends to IWC, which he describes as "flavour of the moment". He wants to position IWC as "a specialist for men's and big watches as we did for Panerai by word of mouth."

As for Jaeger LeCoultre: "There is a lot to be done. There is not a great awareness of Jaeger LeCoultre in this country except in London, and there is huge potential for the brand."

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But, however excited he may become about the potential of other brands in the portfolio, his first duty – a duty that is also a pleasure – is to be Mr Cartier. "Cartier's heritage is the best in the world and I have never ever seen a better heritage in any company capable of designing watches or jewellery. I could look at our archives for hours, if not days, and the level of creativity amazes me. What we have been doing over the last 150 years has been spectacular. We have treasures in our archives that will help us design lines of products for at least the next 500 years." ◉