



Ralph and Roberto Boghossian

NEXT GENERATION

Keeping a jewellery business in the family

Two sixth-generation members of the **Boghossian family** are continuing to develop high-end jewellery with their father and uncle, blending Eastern and Western cultures to create contemporary masterpieces

In the exclusive world of high-end jewellers, the Geneva-based Boghossian House is making waves with stunning pieces of fine and high jewellery that reflect its Armenian heritage. Now run by the fifth and sixth generations of the family, its origins date back 150 years to a city on the Silk Road which linked East and West for many centuries. And its distinctive designs draw inspiration from sophisticated Eastern techniques and apply them to modern Western aesthetics.

One such is the firm's signature 'The Art of Inlay' pieces which set one gem within another. Another is the 'Kissing Gems' technique which brings together two precious stones set above one another in a poetic embrace, highlighting each

other's hues and beauty. Its latest development is the 'Merveilles' collection in which diamonds are held together on all sides of the jewels, with no visible means of support, seemingly floating in the air.

'We strive to offer something relevant and original to our customers,' says Ralph Boghossian. 'Our designs all revolve around light – freeing it, enhancing it and contrasting it. We like to think of designing jewellery as painting with light: gold interferes with the sparkle of the gems, so we try to minimise its use to get the purest light reflection through the gems.'

The family's involvement in the jewellery business began in 1868 when Ovaness Boghossian opened a goldsmith's

workshop in the town of Mardin in the former Ottoman Empire, one of the ancient trade centres of the famous Silk Road. The family was then uprooted at the beginning of World War I and fled to the Syrian city of Aleppo, where the founder's grandson opened a shop and rebuilt the jewellery business from scratch.

Throughout their business's history, the family continued to travel widely along the Silk Road and further afield, strengthening its business connections and sustainability. They began acquiring rough diamonds from Africa, sourced precious coloured stones from India, Burma and Colombia, and secured fine natural pearls from China.

By 1960, the family moved to Beirut – the 'French Riviera and Switzerland of the Middle East', and the region's most promising market. But after the civil war broke out in Lebanon in the 1970's, two fifth-generation family members moved to Europe: Jean established himself as the diamond and colour gemstone expert in Antwerp, supplying leading gem collectors; his brother Albert moved to Geneva, where he established further the family expertise for exclusive gems including colour diamonds and developed new techniques of manufacturing jewellery to mount them for ever-more demanding customers.

Today, Albert is chief executive of the company, working with Jean's sons: Roberto is head of sales and manages the London and international operations; Ralph is head of marketing and the collections production. 'We were always prepared to join the business,' says Roberto. 'Since the age of ten we had spent countless days and weeks in our Dad's office at the Antwerp Diamond Bourse to experience and understand the world of gems and jewellery. We did internships in the industry, from sorting, polishing and cutting gems to working in auction houses. We also graduated from the Gemological Institute of America courses.'

'As with every family, we do not always agree on everything,' says Ralph, 'but at the end the best interest of the company prevails. We have sought, when necessary, the help of an external consultant to align our divergent thoughts, say what needs to be said, and reach a common vision and strategy for the company. We are all very different but also complement each other, which

helps us find a balance. And we make sure we keep the family united.’ ‘Patience is a virtue’, says the Patriarch Albert. ‘Keeping the family united with each and every one having different ideas and ambition is not an easy task, but through patience, common sense and an ambitious project in sight, we have been able to conduct the transition from the fifth to the sixth-generation while keeping the family united behind our project’.

Philanthropy has always been a tradition for the family. In Mardin at the end of the 19th Century, communities from different cultures and rites, thrived in this trading hub which was once referred to as the ‘small Jerusalem’.

The first example of multicultural societies took place in the different regions spread along the Silk Road where not only there were exchanges of goods but also of ideas and thoughts. ‘Our heritage, our strong sense of unity and our sensitivity towards philanthropy, thus flows from this,’ says Ralph. The family has always been active in giving back to society. Since the 60’s, they began supporting humanitarian, social and environmental projects, and have funded several projects in Armenia, Lebanon and, more recently Syria. In 2006, Jean and Albert Boghossian created a Centre for Dialogue between



The ‘Palmette’ Necklace sold during Christie’s auction in 2017, setting the record price for an emerald necklace with no clarity enhancement.

the cultures of East and West, the cultural dimension of the Boghossian Foundation, now based in Brussels, in the Villa Empain – an Art Deco Landmark.

‘Today, we see many companies in the luxury world being attentive to their impact on the environment and how they source and produce their items. We celebrate the cultures of the countries our family has thrived in, and we try to interpret their rich heritage in our product. We believe that by cherishing those values, and recalling to mind the refinement those regions brought to our world, we would indeed initiate a first point of contact between different cultures and break free of the boundaries of prejudice and bitterness.’

Roberto says that when he and his younger brother joined the business, the pinnacle of their ambitions was to preserve what had already been accomplished and to develop it further. They believe they can best achieve this if the business remains privately held and family-controlled. ‘We hope that future generations will share our vision and join the operations, so that the family role in the business can continue for another six generations or more.’●

Two brothers, Ralph and Roberto Boghossian, are the sixth generation members in the jewellery business.’



Boghossian Foundation – Villa Empain in Brussels, Belgium