

GRAND MASTER

Marwan Chatila has developed a dedicated following among aficionados of top-end jewellery. Meet the chess-loving, Balzac-reading gentleman jeweller of Bond Street

Photograph by Robert Astley-Sparke

I'd be lucky if I saw another one of that colour and size in my lifetime," says Marwan Chatila, rather wistfully. He is speaking of an exceptionally rare and valuable one-carat red diamond, currently tucked away in a safe in Geneva. He seems to miss it as if it were a family member. His passion for coloured stones, and coloured diamonds in particular, is clearly strong. Yet he is wonderfully unsnobbish about their appeal, going on to enthuse with equal fondness about more familiar (and much less expensive) diamond varieties: brown-yellows, orange-browns, pastel greens. All of which are abundantly and magnificently displayed in his Bond Street boutique.

Though plush and panelled, the space is low-key and unflashy—rather like the man himself. The fourth generation of the Chatila family to be active in the jewellery trade, Marwan opened the brand's London boutique in 1987. He has been there ever since. Though Bond Street has changed a good deal in that time, he says, it remains unique. "There's no other street in the world where serious jewellery buyers have so much choice." That must make for some stiff competition. "Healthy competition," he says with a smile. "And anyway there are still more buyers than sellers."

As well as the association with coloured diamonds, Marwan is much admired for his openness and accessibility. His is one of the few big-name boutiques where a client can step off the street and speak to the man whose name is over the door. "We're still a 100 percent family-run business and we're always here for our clients. We know them by name and by habit. A lot of clients have become my friends; a lot of friends have become my clients." That must have led to some interesting requests over the years. "Well, once somebody ordered a diamond ring for his parrot—along with an engagement ring for his wife."

After hours, Marwan keeps a low profile—no yachts or jets, just an addiction to chess and, at the moment, Balzac. "By London standards, I lead a simple life." He and his wife Azia have a five-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Theodora—who apparently shares something of her father's eye for interesting design. "We went to Barcelona for three days recently. She learnt how to pronounce Gaudí's name and thought the buildings were very cartoonish and funny," he says with evident pride.

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