

Full-finger ring crafted in 18-karat white gold glimmers with round diamonds.



BUTANI'S INGENIOUS WONDERS



Exquisite elements make for organic creations that bring Butani's craftsmanship and artistry to the fore. The brand's distinctive style and creative harmony tie together the jeweller's Indian heritage and Asian aesthetics.

The Hong Kong-based haute joaillerie brand recently celebrated its 40th anniversary. A capsule collection – unveiled at Baselworld earlier this year to mark the forty-year milestone – featured nine exquisitely handcrafted pieces that boldly embrace the brilliance of diamonds, while highlighting the subtle flowing lines and gentle drops. Among the show-stealers were opulent pieces that brilliantly distilled the beauty of fancy yellow diamonds. By **SMITHA SADANANDAN**





(From left) Manoj Butani, Papu Butani and Mukesh Butani.



TOP: Diamond chandelier ear-cuffs mounted in 18-karat white gold.

ABOVE: 18-karat white gold ear cuffs dripping with diamonds.

With their roots in gem-trading, Butani's huge repertoire of precious gems and diamonds becomes apparent in its artful design choices. Papu Butani moved from India to Hong Kong, when he was very young. After his father passed away, Papu landed himself a job – that of selling loose diamonds and gemstones. It so happened that a friend asked Papu to create bespoke jewellery for his daughter's wedding. Encouraged by the request, Papu designed a special necklace and earring suite. His friend was thrilled at the final pieces. This prompted Papu to gradually chart his own course and create jewellery. Soon after, at a trade show, he met an influential client from the Middle East who bought all those lovely pieces.

As his confidence in design and artistry grew, Papu digressed from gem-trade. He began to craft high jewellery and, by the late '70s, had set up his own company – Butani.

The dedication to perfection enabled the brand to gain a foothold in the crowded jewellery scene. Making personalised handcrafted jewellery for noted retail houses got their work noticed, and with the use of high-quality diamonds and gemstones, Butani pushed the envelope

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of high jewellery. The brand counts among its clients, members of royal families and discerning jewellery enthusiasts across the world.

Meanwhile, Butani was doing lucrative business in the Caribbean Islands, and it seemed like a logical step to open a store in the region. So, in the '80s, the brand opened its first boutique in Sint Maarten.

“After graduating from Stern School of Business at NYU, my brother and I worked in banking in New York. My father then asked us to join the business. Having seen our father's devotion to design and his business acumen, it was natural that we developed an interest in the business. We started participating in international jewellery exhibitions – Baselworld, Hong Kong, Dubai, Doha and Bahrain. This helped build our customer base around the world,” says



TOP LEFT: Twisted linear ear cuffs in 18-karat gold shimmer with white diamonds.



CENTRE: High jewellery white gold necklace featuring curvy components studded with white diamonds.



BELOW: The grand 18-karat white gold cuff with folded finials is suffused with white diamonds.



TOP: Diamond cluster earrings in 18-karat white gold encase pear-shaped emeralds.



ABOVE: Chandelier earrings in 18-karat white gold set with a spray of ruby and diamond tassels.

Manoj Butani, who along with his brother, Mukesh, has taken the once-regional brand into the international arena.

What has been the most exciting as well as challenging part about the business, so far? “The move from wholesale to retail brought forth new challenges: managing frontline sales and creating interiors for the boutiques. But we have learned a tremendous amount since we opened our first boutique in 2007,” says Manoj, director of Butani. “We have also been travelling a significant amount. There are a lot of changes that are on in the luxury market, and clearly, this is not a time to sit back and wait for things to happen. We have to be proactive, drive change and continue to be creative and get closer to our clients,” says Manoj.

Butani is one of the handful of Indian jewellery brands that has established itself on foreign shores. How tough were the early years? “Initially, when my father started the business, he used to sell to his clients based either on a design or sketch,” says Manoj. “However, nowadays, our clients need to touch and feel the piece – they need to see it on themselves to determine if they like it.”

The family-run brand has grown from a four-member team to over a hundred. What about the initial team?

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“We are proud to say that those four employees are still with us and remain an important part of our day-to-day operations,” says Manoj.

With retail boutiques at the Venetian Macau Resort & Casino in Dubai, and a flagship store at the Peninsula Hotel in Hong Kong, Butani has indeed come a long way. “Every season, we come up with new and interesting collections, wherein each piece is one of a kind.”

As a family, the Butanis have a strong work ethic and are committed to providing the best service and individual attention possible to their clients. “This consistency and determination has formed a big part of our success,” explains Manoj.

With a team of six talented designers based in Hong Kong and Italy, Butani continues to take a meticulous



TOP LEFT: These stylised diamond hoops in 18-karat white gold were worn by the former First Lady of the United States of America, Michelle Obama, at the official state dinner at the White House.



CENTRE: The openwork 18-karat white gold bangle with a curvilinear frame is dotted with pear and round-cut diamonds.

BELOW: Chandelier earrings in 18-karat white gold, set with round and pear-cut diamonds.



RIGHT: High jewellery V-shaped necklace in 18-karat white gold outfitted with black and white diamonds, and rubies.

BELOW: High jewellery bracelet in 18-karat gold set with diamonds and rubies.



RIGHT: Stylised earrings in 18-karat white gold set with black and white diamonds, and rubies.

BELOW: High jewellery necklace in 18-karat gold set with diamonds and rubies.



approach to its jewellery, often drawing upon nature for inspiration. Depending on the technical challenges presented by individual designs, the craftsmen employ a variety of stone-setting techniques – mystery, griffe, micro and channel – to realise the brand’s vision. “Each piece is sketched and crafted by hand. Therefore, it takes a skilled artisan, endless imagination, and many hours to design just one unique piece,” he explains.

Butani has been worn by celebrities such as Beyoncé, Celine Dion, Jennifer Lopez and Rihanna, besides prominent members of royal families and heads of state. “Most recently, the former First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama wore our earrings. That was truly a humbling moment,” recalls Manoj.

Rubies find a very special place in the collections by Butani. “We use diamonds in all our jewellery – their brilliance and fire are unparalleled in comparison to any other precious gemstone. But, we also love the energy and beauty of vibrant red rubies. When we pair rubies and diamonds in a piece, the rich contrast makes for truly magnificent jewels. Also, we like using emeralds. Emeralds have been favoured by the oldest and most established



18-karat gold cocktail ring composed with diamonds and rubies.

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cultures in the world; their colour signifies the greenery of the earth that is so soothing and tranquil. The maharajas loved emeralds and we love them just as much.”

Plans to set up stores in India are on the anvil. The brand sees huge potential in India, as consumers are becoming more selective and intelligent about what they buy. “They don’t want to wear a uniform top-to-toe look, and that’s where our pieces come in,” he adds.

What’s next for Butani? “Establishing a presence in the United States and Europe is a key growth strategy and something we will be focusing on in the next 12 months,” says Manoj. ■



TOP: The Bloom collection takes its inspiration from the Alpine cinquefoil flower. The signature motif of this collection is a five-petaled flower; its heart-shaped petals echo the letter 'B' of Butani. Decorated in white diamonds, the three domes signify the unity of the founder and his sons. The collection is crafted in variations of 18-karat white, yellow and rose gold.



LEFT: The dramatic cuff in 18-karat gold bears geometric motifs studded with diamonds, sapphires and rubies.