

World

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World 30

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WITH
COMPLIMENTS



PARTRIDGE
JEWELLERS

EST 1864

150
CELEBRATING
YEARS

JEWELS IN THE BLOOD

EST 1864
150
CELEBRATING
YEARS

PARTRIDGE JEWELLERS
CELEBRATES 150 YEARS IN BUSINESS THIS YEAR,
WITH THE SIXTH GENERATION OF THE
DYNASTY PLAYING HER OWN ROLE IN THE
COMPANY'S LONG-RUNNING SUCCESS.
MICHAL MCKAY TRACES THE HISTORY.



Grant Partridge is a connoisseur of watches. Very beautiful watches that bear names like Patek Philippe, Jaeger-LeCoultre and Rolex. They make a stunning display in “Haute Horology” area on the first floor of his Queen Street store. His own horology collection glitters with prize timepieces. But despite his obvious delight in the keeping of time, he confesses his real passion is jewellery.

It’s been a lifelong obsession for the company’s managing director. And this year the Partridge family will celebrate not only 150 years of business in New Zealand (possibly the oldest-established family business in the country) but also six generations within the jewellery dynasty that bears its name.

This pioneering spirit originated in England, in the small town of Kingsbridge, Devon, where James Timothy Partridge was born in 1839. His grandfather, Timothy Smale, was an experienced jeweller and silversmith who had been in business since 1824. With no sons of his own, he trained his grandson in the skills and techniques of engraving and jewellery manufacturing. As a recognised artist in his field, J.T., as he was known, took over the family business, by now in its 50th year of trading. But as the family grew to eight children, the rooms above the little shop in Fore Street grew too small for J.T. and his wife Mary. And so, lured by the promise of a fortune to be made in far-off Aotearoa, the family boarded the emigrant ship Waipa, finally disembarking in Canterbury and settling in Timaru. The rest, as they say, is history.

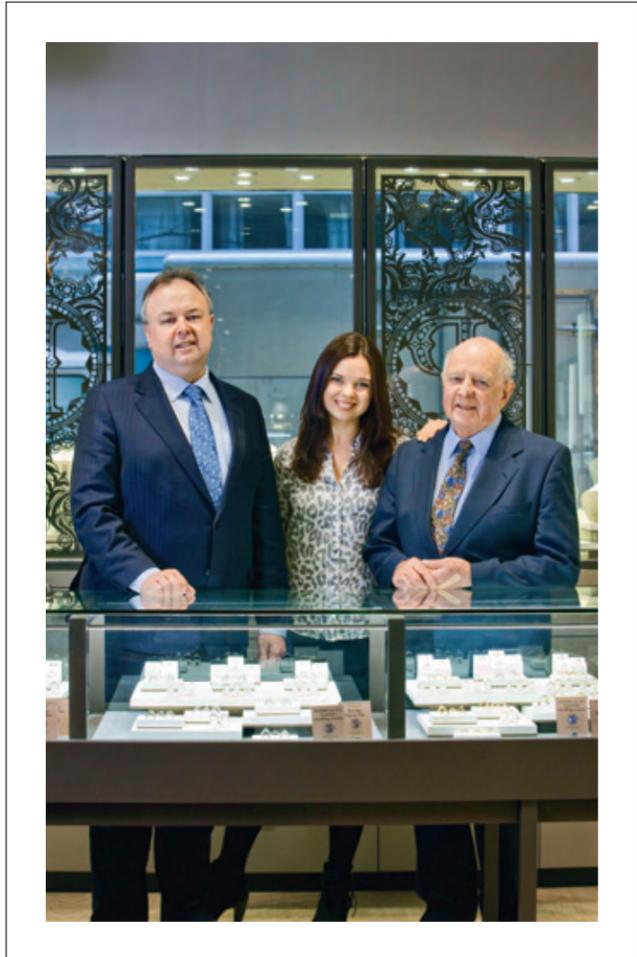
J.T.’s workmanship soon gained him – and subsequently his sons – a fine reputation. Having moved to Christchurch, where he became involved in local politics, it was his son Linnaeus Richard (known as L.R.) who took over, transferring the business to Willis Street in

Wellington. There he joined forces with another well-established jeweller, George Jenness. This partnership flourished under the name of Jenness & Partridge for a further 40 years.

J.T. also became actively involved in politics, helping to found the NZ Employers Federation and ultimately becoming president of the Wellington Manufacturers Association. But his bequest remains his skill and artistic talent. And having trained numerous apprentices, including his son Cecil Linnaeus, who took over the business in 1949, the company ultimately became C. L. Partridge & Son, with both a factory and a shop. Among many distinguished commissions was a silver salver for Queen Elizabeth II.

Cecil’s son, Ray, opened Partridge Jewellers on Perrets Corner and followed this shop with others around Wellington selling fine jewellery, Swiss watches and crystal. Ray was a goldsmith and it was this legacy that became Grant’s playing field at the age of 16.

Jewellery is Grant’s hobby. And his life. But as an astute businessman, he also saw the



Three generations of the Partridge Jewellers family (from left): Grant, Nikki and Ray.

potential in the watch trade and set about acquiring some of the world’s most prestigious brand names.

“We started with Rolex, but other brands came along.” Among these were Breguet, Breitling, Chopard, Cartier,

ASHOKA DIAMONDS

One of the rarest cuts of diamond in the world. Each cut has 62 facets with an elongated shape allowing it to reflect more light than any other. Known as the “Emperor of Emperors”, the original Ashoka diamond was discovered in India – a unique 41.37 carats. And flawless. New York diamond cutter William Goldberg transformed the diamond’s aspects of shape, energy and ability to capture light into a cut that was so original it gained its own patent.



DIAMOND ENGAGEMENT RINGS

A diamond, signifying enduring love because of its strength and beauty, first became popular as part of an engagement ring in the 1930s. But it’s thought the betrothal ring itself dates back to Roman times. The most popular cut is the round brilliant, with 58 facets, but others are the Princess, Emerald, Oval and Cushion cuts.

Dior, Gucci and Jaeger-LeCoultre. On his acquisition of the Patek Philippe brand, Grant says: "It came along in 2004 after a long courtship – many years of a solid campaign. They only have around 400 global outlets and we have two of them. For our 150-year celebration we will have two unique one-off pieces which they have made available especially for us."

But it is the jewellery side of the Partridge business that produces the real sparkle in Grant's eye. He admits he has absorbed his prodigious knowledge somewhat like osmosis. "Well," he says, "I did start at 16 and have never left it." When he goes overseas – which is often – he has one mission in mind: to look at jewellery. And he selects with painstaking precision. He regards the trade fair of BaselWorld as the ultimate. "Everyone in the industry meets there. They have 2,500 exhibitors, including most of the Swiss watch brands."

The result of this worldwide research is that Partridge Jewellers harbour the most covetable jewellery names in

life of another decade at most, highly sought after.

As the only jeweller in Australasia permitted to craft the Ashoka diamond into bespoke pieces, he set about acquiring this exclusive name. The Ashoka cut is attributed to William Goldberg – a globally recognised diamond cutter from the Bronx – and the business is now run by his family. Grant arranged an introduction to Eve Goldberg (William's daughter) and with only around 20 dealers in the world having access to this name, he "felt very privileged to meet this very imposing woman". Obviously, he convinced her.

Partridge is now a national company with five stores – the most recent opening in Christchurch last year. Grant opened Queen Street, Auckland in 1999 (managed by Glenn Peachey), took over another space in Newmarket (manager: Christine Power) and in 2009 opened in Queenstown, the shop run by his daughter Nikki. Nikki represents the sixth generation of jewellers in the Partridge line. She's also the first female and holds



the world – the Ashoka-cut, and Argyle Pink diamonds (from Australia's Kimberley Ranges) being the jewels, so to speak, in a dazzling crown. But there are also glamour names such as Gucci, Furrer Jacot and Crivelli with their unique craftsmanship and distinguishing hallmark designs.

"It took forever to get the Argyle Pink diamond business," says Grant. "The ateliers they select are put through a rigorous process. If we think a diamond is precious, an Argyle Pink diamond is extraordinarily precious – one of the rarest in the world." And, with a production

both a Bachelor of Design (with honours), majoring in jewellery design, and a Bachelor of Commerce, majoring in marketing. She and Sean Butler are the company's bespoke specialists. Both, explains Grant, are "talented designers rather than goldsmiths, in that the former create and the latter make".

All stores have well-qualified gemologists on site, with four more in training, plus a staff geologist heading off to New York next year to study at GIA. Although bespoke designs originate in the Partridge premises, a



AUTORE PEARLS

South Seas pearls have long seduced discerning jewellery specialists. And the Autore pearls, which grow in the warm waters off the northwest coast of Western Australia, are among the most seductive in the world.

The Autore pearl gains its high grading through the five S's: shine, shape, surface, shade and size.



THE ARGYLE PINK DIAMOND

These precious and extremely rare diamonds come from a mine in the East Kimberley region of Western Australia. The mine produces over 90 per cent of the world's pink diamonds, along with other naturally coloured stones, including champagne, cognac and rare blue diamonds. However, it's thought the mine's productive life will end in another decade, making pink diamonds especially rare and unique.

design may draw on the talents of the world's top stonecutters and goldsmiths for its realisation: from the first consultation through to minutely detailed sketches to the setting and positioning of the gems, many specialists may be involved. And it is Grant's responsibility to find the best.

"I go to Hong Kong, Geneva and Bangkok – the Asians have been in the jewellery business for centuries and their technical skill is extraordinary," he says. "Germany has the best goldsmiths and I buy the most beautiful stones from Idar-Oberstein, which is the home of stone cutting.

"But the factories in Thailand are also exceptional, not only for their sheer volume but you are able to have several people working on a piece with such precision it is remarkable. However, in the end, what is most important is having the best people to do the job – either directly here or overseas."

It is Grant and Glenn who oversee the store interiors, a feat in itself, particularly with brands that are very particular about the way their products are displayed. "They send the furniture and often specialists to install it," he says.

With three sons – "still too young to tell if they will want to continue the business" – and daughter Nikki, who also creates her own range, Halo, the longevity of the Partridge dynasty looks to be on a firm footing. **W**

www.partridgejewellers.com

HALO

This special collection was created by Nikki Partridge. Her contemporary range, with its idiosyncratic twists, uses cognac and white marquise and brilliant-cut diamonds in free-flowing asymmetric shapes that give each piece its own unique form. "When I design bespoke pieces," she says, "I like to get to know the client... I want it to feel 100 per cent personal to them and make sure that every time they look at it, they love it."

