

Created by: Debra C. Argen

H Stern Interview



H. STERN has been captivating jewelry lovers for over 60 years!

H. STERN (www.HSTERN.net or www.HSTERN.com.br) celebrates its 60th anniversary this year, which is quite an achievement, especially in the highly competitive world of jewelry design. I recently had the opportunity to interview Mr. Hans Stern and his sons, Roberto and Ronaldo regarding their accomplishments.



Luxury Experience Magazine: Mr. Hans Stern, when you began your business in 1945, did you ever dream that you would one day have 165 stores in 12 countries?

Hans Stern: No, I could never have foreseen this.

LEM: Mr. Stern, to what do you owe your success?

HS: I owe it to arduous work, a portion of luck and qualified co-workers.

LEM: Mr. Stern you are a true innovator, you launched the first Brazilian battery-powered wristwatch, and set up the first goldsmiths' school for 14 to 17 year olds. What are some of your most recent accomplishments?

HS: People nowadays are much more brand-conscious than years ago, so that the NAME of a product can carry an equal or even higher importance than the intrinsic value of the product itself. We have invested heavily in promoting the H.STERN brand, not only by having celebrities and opinion makers wear our jewels and watches at important events, but also by establishing H.STERN partnerships with reputable retailers in a number of cities and countries with reduced or no presence.

LEM: Mr. Stern, do you see a change in the jewelry industry? When you first began your business, the emphasis was on colored stones. Have certain stones increased or decreased in appeal over the years? And if so, why do you think that is?

HS: Yes, definitely. As mentioned above, design, branding, and perfect finish and presentation have become almost as important as "so many carats or grams of metals". But - with the exception of an over-inflated surge of "investment diamonds" in the 1980s - well cut, genuine gemstones have never shown a decrease in value and appeal over the years.

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LEM: Mr. Stern, you have created an international company that has an outstanding reputation for its excellence and quality. What motivates you, and what advice would you give to young companies to succeed?

HS: What motivated me most, at the very beginning, were my handicaps of being born and raised half blind and Jewish in Nazi Germany, and considered a foreigner when I came to Brazil at the age of 16. I am a workaholic and a voracious reader, and learned from Dale Carnegie how to develop a good team. My advice to youngsters is "work hard, stay focused, be honest and straightforward, and follow Hillel's Biblical rule of not doing to others what you don't wish to be done to you.

LEM: When I met Mr. Hans Stern in his office in Rio de Janeiro in April 2004, he told me that he loved tourmalines. Mr. Roberto Stern, what are your favorite stones, and why?

Roberto Stern: At the time being, Emeralds, because we just finished a wonderful necklace with very rare stones after 7 months of hard work. But I do not have favorite stones. I studied gemology more than 20 years ago and became a designer 15 years ago. My creative process usually starts with a concept, and then I decide if the piece will be with gold, polished or textured, with stones or without stones, with diamonds, and color or no color are a consequence. I mix many stones and look for unusual colors.

LEM: Mr. Roberto Stern, you are responsible for the move from the success of colored stones to the impressive new designs for H. STERN. Where do you get your inspiration?

RS: When we have a very rare stone, there is not much to do in terms of design, just get the proportions right. I still do this work, which was started by my father. So I felt I had to do something of my own and the move came quite naturally without forgetting our roots. Our inspiration comes mostly from nature, but also from street behavior, architecture, music, arts, other artists, movies and there are endless sources. We only do not take inspiration from ourselves. I mean jewelers tend to go to trade fairs and look at what others are doing. This is very dangerous. One can copy each other without even being conscious about it.

LEM: Mr. Stern, what effect does the world of fashion influence jewelry design? Does the use of certain colors or types of fabric come into play when you are developing the new design collections?

RS: Fashion people are very creative, they have to come with 4 collections per year, and it's admirable what they do. We do look what they do, but not at the fabrics or colors, as jewelry must be more perennial than fashion. One has to find out what are their sources of inspirations. For example, when Tom Ford used the music of Belle de Jour in one of his Fashion Shows, we looked at Bunnel and Hitchcock, and thought that we needed to become a little bit perverted. So we did cuff's or bangles, much before any of the other jewelers. Big bangles are still "hot" in the jewelry world today. To look at fashion is more important than looking at fabrics or colors. Many of Fashion Designers are extremely bright.

LEM: Mr. Stern, H. STERN has created many custom pieces including designing jewelry for the movies. What was your most challenging design to make and why?

RS: We have been doing custom pieces since the beginning. Time is usually the only constraint. We have been challenged many times and so far have always succeeded in reaching the goal. Usually the most challenging designs are the simplest ones, and when people ask for something more complicated, it is often easier, although it might seem differently. Of course, we cannot find rare stones in a short period of time. In the case of the emerald necklace mentioned above, it took us 10 years to collect them.

LEM: Mr. Ronaldo Stern, you are in the New York store. Do you see any trend here in New York that is different from other areas of the world?

Ronaldo Stern: New York is often a precursor of trends - meaning that the trends are not necessarily different, but they start early here because New Yorkers tend to be "early adopters". There was the pink craze, the green wave, the chandelier earrings and most recently the "bohemian chic" trend...

Another thing we see in New York is a fascination with Diamonds. Although the whole world loves diamonds, in New York (as in the rest of the US), the consumer is more into it than the rest of the world...

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and the city is also known as a destination for buying diamonds because the jewelers here have a large and varied selection. We often celebrate client's engagements in the store.

LEM: Mr. Stern, what are your favorite stones, and why?

RS: I like many different stones, and we usually try to use "different" ones in our designs. In any case, I do like aquamarines. I love the deep blue that top quality aquamarines have, which can complement most skin and eye color. As a sea lover I like its name, derived from the color of the ocean, although most of the time the color matches our sky.

On the technical side, aquamarines are pretty hard, making it difficult to scratch. They are also available in large sizes, and I have seen so many different and creative cuts of aquamarines.

Thank you, and congratulations again on your outstanding accomplishments! Happy 60th anniversary! For additional information on **H. STERN** see www.HSTERN.net or www.HSTERN.com.br.

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