

## Spotlight

# GRAND DESIGNER

**I** used to collect stones as a child," says James de Givenchy when asked what inspired him to become a jeweller, as if it has just dawned on him on that these two things may be related. Now, instead of collecting pretty rocks on the beach in France, de Givenchy travels widely to collect some of the rarest and most beautiful gemstones in the world for his clients. He is one of the emerging stars on the high-jewellery scene. His company is called Taffin, his family name (de Givenchy is their title). His designs are full of imagination and creativity, just the kind of thing you'd expect from the nephew of legendary couturier Hubert de Givenchy.

He loves to work with unusual materials, like the aged silver rope he coiled into a nest for a 94-carat yellow-sapphire brooch. The results are unexpected and unique: for example, his stag-head pin carved out of Meerscham with a giant red spinel hanging from it. It seems as though de Givenchy has a wonderful story for every stone that passes through his hands. He talks excitedly about a Colombian emerald from a now-closed mine. "See how rich the colour is? It would be impossible to find that kind of stone now."

Technically, his pieces are perfect—the earrings so light you barely feel them on your ears, necklaces that comfortably follow the curve of your collarbone. De Givenchy is a sophisticated designer; his jewellery is probably not for the masses. He works closely with his clients but wants to keep his work distinct. "Clients can make great suggestions, but you always want to keep a bit of your own integrity in the design."

Creativity and originality runs in the family. He was born in Beauvais to the Marquis de Givenchy and his wife Patricia, the daughter of a U.S. Army lieutenant-colonel; he and his twin brother are the youngest of seven children. His family tree is full of successful artists and nearly all his brothers and sisters are doing something related to the arts. De Givenchy studied graphic design at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, but it wasn't until he was working at Christie's jewellery department in Los Angeles that he rediscovered his childhood love of stones. He spent a brief spell at Verdura before setting up on his own.

The Verdura magic rubbed off. "There is something about James's work that reminds people of the exclusivity of the 50s," says his friend Harry Fane, a London-based jewellery dealer. "With so many luxury brands in jewellery around, James's pieces are so private and exceptional. He has a very distinct idea of good taste." He adds: "Although he has an easy charm, he is also a frightfully good designer." Patti Wong, head of Sotheby's Diamonds, who commissioned de Givenchy to design a limited-edition range, agrees. "He is artistic and well-respected, and he has a good bespoke service. He has a big following with people in the know. We love working with him."

In the future, de Givenchy might consider expanding into other accessories, such as handbags. However, one thing is certain: "I just don't think that I would ever want to go too mainstream."

—DAISY PRINCE





MAN OF TASTE

James de Givenchy, photographed in the Taffin showroom in New York. He has channelled his family creativity into jewellery designs that are original and sophisticated.



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