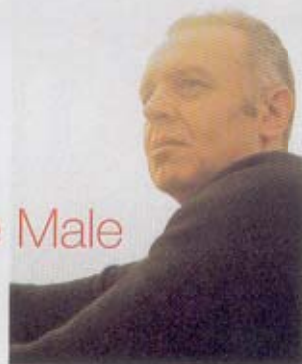


The Progressive Male

Michael Youssoufian



abulously elegant, artistic and valuable jewellery, both antique and contemporary, slips into Hong Kong without fanfare and show. This is the style of Michael Youssoufian, jeweller and designer who comes from legendary family history and tradition. The Youssoufian family has long been recognised as one of the top creators in the world of fine jewellery for generations, dating back more than 60 years.

Michael's grandfather, Joseph Youssoufian, was personal jeweller to the Royal Court of Egypt, the Royal Highness King Fouad and later King Farouk. In 1956, when King Fouad was abdicated, the new rulers of Egypt persecuted the Youssoufian family and the family shop was confiscated.

Even though Michael's father, Alfred, stayed in Egypt for a few years, he made frequent trips to London where he found new opportunities and eventually left Egypt for good. In 1962,

Alfred Youssoufian decided to open a shop in Geneva, Switzerland and later two other shops in Capri and Rome, Italy. The latter two shops were sold in 1980. However the shop in Geneva is still operated by his father where he serves a very privileged clientele.

Beginning with his childhood and throughout his life, Michael Youssoufian has been in contact with Art in one form or another. His mother, Gladys Gwendoline Conway, was a very well known Opera singer and actress in Egypt during World War II. At the age of seven, Michael had already participated in children pantomimes with his mother.

After completing his studies in Egypt and London, Michael Youssoufian, attended the Geneva Art School to become a painter. However, his father had other ideas. Like many traditional fathers, Alfred Youssoufian wanted his son to follow in his footsteps and enter the family business.

Not to be deterred from his goal in art, Michael developed a compromise with his father. Along with his art studies, he studied in the School of Plastic Arts, which gave him opportunities to serve an apprenticeship in several factories. "So I would study jewellery design and well as other art designs by day

while studying art and other artistic activities, like dancing at night," Michael points out.

During this time he won many Geneva Jewellery Awards and impressed critics in the circle. Because of his diversified apprenticeships in art design, he not only became a jewellery designer but also a prototype watch modeller. One of his projects was collaboration with Gerald Genta, which resulted in the creation a very prominent and successful timepiece. Through these works and studies, he gained a greater appreciation for all forms of art and design as well as a much greater technical background compared to many jewellers.

This diversified design and production experience gave Michael Youssoufian more than just a solid foundation to enter the family business. Coupled with his childhood upbringing, there was an ongoing forward and upward moving, step-by-step

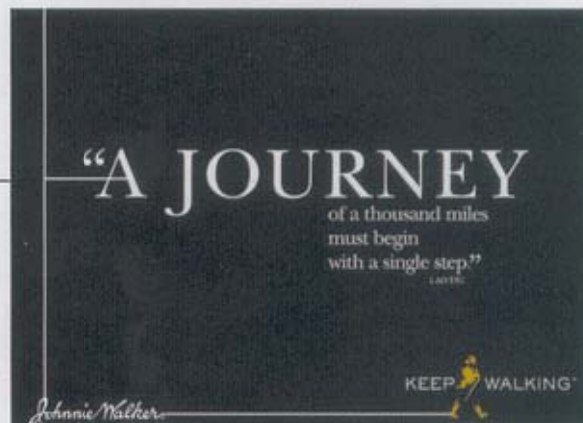
foundation being developed that would set him apart and impact his reputation in the jewellery business. He also demonstrated and will continue to do so, that he is a free thinker, ever growing, his way, and yet not totally upsetting the traditional either.

Upon entering the family business, he continued his studies on jewellery and design with intensive courses in gem cutting and learning more about precious stones. According to Michael, "while doing the apprenticeships, I learned that I really did have a natural talent for jewellery. So I was not just pleasing my father but took another step in fulfilling myself also."

What Michael didn't realize at the time, all these activities and trainings were honing his inner natural instinct and eye for fine artistic and valuable jewellery to a razor edge that would eventually give him a presence of authority, easily recognized and accepted by others, even though his attitude was and would be unpretentious. This is always true of many successful men, those that are ever growing, being their own man, being in some ways traditional but at the same time advancing ever forward with new ideas and adding their own signature to everything. They stand ever firm and confident in who they are, what they do, their abilities and how they will do it — a grandiose with a soft touch that just slips-in, they never blow their own horn.

Gradually Michael moved more and more into the commercial and business side of the jewellery business. In 1975, Michael started travelling more in search of antique and valuable jewellery for their clients. The business did not just sell their designs and take on commissions but included finding various antique pieces for their clients, which included private collectors, museums, like Cartier and others like Sotheby's. Over the years, Michael has maintained excellent relationships with all the family's contacts worldwide.

He started with trips to South America, where a lot of European jewellery ended up after World War II, and expanded to many places, eventually bringing him to Asia. In 1994, he



decided it was time to expand the business to other areas, which became an addition to his travel agenda.

Upon arriving in Hong Kong, he liked it very much, and decided to set-up his base of operations here. "I find the people in Hong Kong to have exceptional interest and taste in fine artistic jewellery," he exclaims. "Not only that they decide on what they want quickly and pay on time. I like being my natural self in Hong Kong, which is a low key and very truthful way of sales — it is appreciated here and the women here have good knowledge of diamonds and precious stones."

During his travels, he collected art and antique cars in Switzerland, did hitchhiking and other adventurous activities. However, today it is different. "I have little time for social life, except that needed for business purposes," Michael points out. "My passion for jewellery occupies most of my time." He takes two to three trips a month looking for one-of-a-kind jewellery for his clients. Also for the past several years he is more and more back into doing his own designs.

"The artistic valuable jewellery and single unique pieces are getting scarce," Michael states. "Fine jewellery is many times the last thing a woman buys and no matter what happens, in most cases, it is the last thing she'll sell. So, once it is purchased or repurchased and moves into a safe or museum, it is no longer available. Now I bring my ideas for artistic jewellery to Asia and one of my contributions is to bring the fine antique look into the modern era — to upgrade it." His designs are being recognized more and more in this part of the world as it was for the Youssoufian's in Europe, U.S. and the Middle East.

Since he had a limited social life, I asked him how he unwound. "I drink a couple of Red Label Johnnie Walker's with soda." What about wine, champagne, etc. — no, he said, only that. This single mindedness in his drink did not surprise me — it is typical of the progressive male. Johnnie Walker salutes Michael Youssoufian, a true example of the progressive male in this world — single mindedness in his life's work, adding his own ideas to grow and expand it further, standing apart from the crowd with a grandiose presence that is admired but who is low key — his work speaks for itself.

