



Jewels With a Conscience

Oro Africa is a South African fine jewellery brand that is almost seven decades old. It believes in best business practices and uses ethically mined gold. In its **recent venture, the firm tied up with the world's largest precious metal refinery, Rand Refinery, to make 'Absolute' wedding bands under registered brand name, Rand Pure,** that come with a guarantee and chain of custody – from ore to store. The jewellery comes in a bubble wrap with a unique code number along with **FSC certification. The firm also ploughs back a substantial amount of its profits** into community programmes and research. The CEO **GARY NATHAN** outlines the history of Oro Africa and the reason behind the genesis of Rand Pure in an exclusive interview with **SOLITAIRE INTERNATIONAL.**



Gary Nathan

When was Oro Africa founded and by whom? Where is it situated and what kind of jewellery does it manufacture?

Our story begins in 1945 – when a fledgling family business was formed as a small cast manufacturer and jewellery wholesaler. From small beginnings, great things can grow – and after years of dedication and industry innovation, 1990 saw a well-established and successful Oro Africa welcoming Steven Nathan on board as financial director. Eight years later, the company's continued success led to a partnership with internationally renowned Italian

gold jewellery manufacturer, Filk Spa, and one of the world's largest gold producers, AngloGold Ashanti.

While this growth and expansion necessitated a business move from Johannesburg to Cape Town, along with a multi-million rand investment in state-of-the-art manufacturing factories and a new head office, the strong family values that epitomise Oro Africa remained – and are present still.

Today, as South Africa's largest manufacturer and exporter of jewellery, we do business with clients in South

Africa, North and South America, China, the United Kingdom, Australia, Europe and the Middle East. In the spirit of giving back to the industry that has offered us so much, Oro Africa is dedicated to recruiting and training future generations of talented young South Africans in the art of jewellery creation.

As a proud member of the Responsible Jewellery Council, we aim to reinforce consumer and stakeholder confidence in jewellery products, while strengthening and protecting the reputation and the integrity of the jewellery industry.

How and when did the idea of making ethical gold jewellery come up? Tell us more about the tie-up with Rand Refinery.

Established by the Chamber of Mines of South Africa in 1920, Rand Refinery is the largest integrated single-site precious metals refining and smelting complex in the world. It is an internationally recognised and accredited global leader in the precious metals industry. Synonymous with integrity and quality, the Rand Refinery mark can be found on cast bars, minted bars, minted coins, coin blanks and medallions. The Kruggerand is the world's premium bullion coin with over 60 million in circulation, making it one of Rand Refinery's top investment products – one that is still sought-after to this day. Above all, it is also committed to education, using its Germiston Gold Zone as the launch pad for young entrants into the gold jewellery industry, and offering them skills training from various CSR initiatives.

It was with this in mind that Oro Africa has recently collaborated with Rand Refinery, to launch Rand Pure™ – a unique responsible gold initiative that is set to be the benchmark for responsible gold fine jewellery manufacturing.

Do you only make gold rings under the Rand Refinery-Oro Africa collaboration? Are you planning to introduce any more sub-brands under this category? If yes, what would they be?

For now we are only making gold and diamond rings. We are in the process of launching a new collection called "Heart of Gold", the Absolute engagement



ring collection. This will be unveiled at JCK Las Vegas in May this year and we have plans to grow this collection into other offerings. Each creation is one of elegance and opulence, uniquely epitomizing the luxuriousness of the Absolute™ brand, while remaining true to its ethical and responsible core.

How many collections have so far been introduced and where is this jewellery sold?

The Absolute collection is currently sold in South Africa, USA, Canada and we are launching this year in Hong Kong.

We would like to know the reactions of retailers. Are they receptive to showcasing this jewellery, and are they proud to keep 'green' gold jewellery?

Retailers who stock Absolute™ jewellery position themselves as truly socially responsible jewellers who make a positive impact on the world.

We prefer not to use the term "green" gold as this creates a perception the gold is recycled. Our gold is specifically newly mined but done so in a responsible manner.



All RandPure™ gold is newly mined, completely untouched, and contains no scrap or recycled gold, and is being worn for the very **first time as an Absolute™** jewellery piece.”

Certified RandPure™ gold is extracted from newly mined gold doré, containing traceable virgin metal of known provenance, with no secondary untraceable sources. All of which ensures that not even the most microscopic scrap of recycled gold is used in the creation of any Absolute™ wedding band – each one is newly made from the purest virgin doré.

On the other hand, with scrap gold it is impossible to know exactly where it comes from – how was it attained – through violence, theft, and so on. Newly mined gold is the only gold of which one can say with absolute certainty where it comes from.

It makes this gold ideal for a couple that is getting married; to use as the symbol of their devotion to each other a gold ring that has never been used before and is from deep within the earth, ethically mined and contributing to the creation of a better future for us all.

We would like to know more about the Ore to Store concept. What is the company's mission behind this adage?

The coveted RandPure™ mark is a

certification of the purity of the gold used. All RandPure™ gold is newly mined, completely untouched, and contains no scrap or recycled gold, and is being worn for the very first time as an Absolute™ jewellery piece. Once the ore is extracted from the mine, it is sent to Rand Refinery where it is kept separately to ensure that it is not mixed with scrap or old gold. Once refined, it is sent to the manufacturing facility (in the premises) where the jewellery is produced. Each piece of jewellery has the gold batch number engraved in it in order to be able to trace exactly where the gold originates from. The final product is sealed and sent to the stores. The entire process is independently audited and the consumer can be confident that the gold used to produce their jewellery piece is 100% pure, responsible gold and newly mined.

In short, we guarantee complete chain of custody, for the Absolute™ collection which comes with a certificate tracing its origin from ore to store.

How have consumers reacted to this brand of jewellery? Are they willing to pay a premium for it?

Consumers are immensely proud to be part of this initiative to promote human rights and responsible, ethical, social and environmental practices across the jewellery supply chain.

We believe that Oro Africa follows ethical practices for this particular collection. How about the rest of the jewellery that you make in gold, platinum and other alternative materials?

We consider ourselves a responsible company not only in the products that we produce but in the way we treat all who we come into contact with. We have a social responsibility programme that we are very proud of. In the spirit of giving back to the industry that has offered us so much, Oro Africa is dedicated to recruiting and training future generations of talented young South Africans in the art of jewellery creation. The entry into the Responsible Jewellery Council has made us focus even more than before, that our real reason for existence is to make a difference to those people around us, our employees, and those in the broader community and of course, our customers. ■

