

Not large,
but in charge:
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minicrossover
D12



OFF DUTY



This French
toast recipe
has us in its
(dead simple)
spell
D7

EATING | DRINKING | STYLE | FASHION | DESIGN | DECORATING | ADVENTURE | TRAVEL | GEAR | GADGETS

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SONIC COUTH

Highly
sophisticated
headphones
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STYLE & FASHION

Emerald and
Diamond Necklace,
\$1,220,000,
Black, Starr & Frost,
949-673-1771

Rocks of Ages

Over 200 years old, jeweler Black, Starr & Frost is ready to become a household name again

BY NANDINI D'SOUZA

ONLY VIA A BLACK velvet jewelry tray could Mary Todd Lincoln and Marilyn Monroe find a common thread. Mrs. Lincoln once racked up a \$64,000 bill for jewels from American jeweler Black, Starr & Frost. Many decades later, the actress name-checked the same company while singing "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" in the 1953 film "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." Her character, Lorelei, was said to be inspired by one of the house's clients, Ziegfeld Follies star Peggy Hopkins Joyce.

Though you may not recognize the name Black, Starr & Frost, the jeweler has an undeniably rich and colorful past. It's one that the current owner and chairman Alfredo J. Molina, who bought the brand in 2006, wants to tap as he works toward his ambitious goal of restoring it to its glory days. "We're America's first jeweler," Mr. Molina said—and repeated during the course of an interview. Of possessing a Black, Starr & Frost gem, he added, "It's owning a piece of history."

That's not hyperbole. The company was founded in 1810 and has operated continuously since—albeit with several name changes along the way. Before the Great Depression, the Black, Starr & Frost store at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 48th Street in Manhattan was *the* place to buy jewelry, table clocks and even class rings.

"The period of the '20s and '30s—the most height of art deco—is probably the most sought-after [period for the brand] in our current market," said Carol Elkins, a senior

vice president of jewelry at Sotheby's. In the past few years, Sotheby's has sold Black, Starr & Frost pieces in the collections of Mrs. Paul "Bunny" Mellon and Brooke Astor. "It was collected by some of the great people in New York society," she added.

That does raise the question of why Black, Starr & Frost isn't an American household name in the vein of Tiffany & Co. Ms. Elkins theorized that the company fell a bit short by not driving innovation: "I wouldn't say they were imitators, but they were doing things that were popular at the time."

Black, Starr & Frost's strength was the

caliber of its gems. "It's really collectible," said Elizabeth Doyle, co-owner of Manhattan vintage-and-estate jewelry shop Doyle & Doyle. "It's beautiful and has high-quality stones."

That quality is something that current owner Mr. Molina, an 11th-generation jeweler and certified gemologist, wants to maintain in everything from his \$7,500 diamond tennis bracelets to a \$1.2 million emerald-and-diamond necklace (pictured above). He's been collecting gems for new pieces for a decade and has partnered with mines to source rough stones. The new

wares, many inspired by old designs that Mr. Molina has been buying at auction and from other secondary sources, can be found at the company's two shops—in Newport Beach, Calif. and Phoenix.

Whether Mr. Molina will fully restore the brand's luster is yet to be seen. But jewelry brands, perhaps more so than fashion houses, have a solid track record of a second chance. (See sidebar "The Encore Club" for more jewelry revivals.) "I believe in history and heritage," said Mr. Molina of jeweler comebacks. "These old brands were about integrity, truth and trust."

THE ENCORE CLUB // FIVE MORE JEWELRY BRANDS THAT HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFULLY RESUSCITATED



Sidney Garber

Though never dormant, the brand, launched in 1946, has returned to the spotlight in recent years through the efforts of the founder's daughter Brooke Garber Neidich. *Georgica Pond Ring*, \$17,850, *Sidney Garber*, 212-274-1111



Verdura

In 1985, ex-Sotheby's jewelry head Ward Landrigan bought the brand started by Italian duke Fulco di Verdura in 1939, and has since built up a new set of dedicated clients. *Lily Bracelet*, \$83,500, *Verdura*, 212-758-3388



Marina B.

Bulgari heir—and former CEO—Marina Bulgari made jewelry under this mark from 1978 to '96. It remained defunct until 2014, when cousin Giorgio Bulgari took the design reins. *Troc Earrings*, \$16,000, *Marina B.* 212-644-1155



David Webb

The favored jeweler of Liz Taylor and Jackie O. died in 1975, but the company, bought by Mark Emanuel and Robert Sadian in 2010, lives on. *Elizabeth Taylor Chimera Bracelet*, \$83,000, *David Webb*, 844-811-9322



Belperron

Defunct for 41 years, the very collectible Belperron was relaunched recently by Nico Landrigan, (Ward's son) who opened a salon, selling both old and new pieces. *Suzanne Belperron Cluster of Grapes Brooch*, \$115,000, *fd-gallery.com*