

JEWELRY

Graff reveals the emotionality behind its record-breaking diamond

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Graff's Lesedi La Rona diamond. Image courtesy of Graff, photo by Ben Hassett

By BRIELLE JAEKEL

CAPE TOWN, South Africa British jeweler Graff recently revealed the largest polish diamond in 100 years, but its namesake founder revealed the process and more of the label's priceless stories in a conversation at the Cond Nast International Luxury Conference.

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Laurence Graff, the founder of the brand, takes a lot of pride in his work, but it is the brand's latest find that has him excited almost more than ever before. The brand's recent reveal showed a diamond that Mr. Graff said took an entire year to produce after it was unearthed in Botswana, but the founder wonders if it will take another 100 years to find another stone so precious, he said during a discussion with Suzy Menkes at the summit.

"I want to go all the way back to when my first boss said the sky is the limit," Mr. Graff said. "I've now produced the first stone that is the limit."

Unearthing greatness

The British jeweler unveiled the 302.7-carat polished diamond, which marks a number of firsts for the gemstone industry.

The polished Leased La Rona diamond comes from the 1,109-carat rough diamond of the same name, which was unearthed in Botswana's Lucara Karowe mine. Along with being the largest emerald-cut diamond, the Lesedi La Rona is the largest diamond to achieve the Gemological Institute of America's highest marks for color and clarity ([see story](#)).

Mr. Graff showed his delight in being the one to produce the diamond, but also revealed that the same find also resulted in 66 satellite diamonds, 43 of which have already been sold.

The impressive master stone, which was kept a secret its entire time of polish, is not only a first for the brand but it is also the largest diamond with the highest color, highest purity, excellent cut and excellent symmetry produced.

Graff presents its impressive diamond

Among the newsworthy reveal, Mr. Graff also told a few stories to delight the audience, many of which included his humble beginnings. One story reveals that he was invited by Madame Marcus to meet him by a yacht at midnight, thinking he was going to sell some diamonds that were in his pocket.

The trip turned out to be a seven night cruise, where he had no clothes but the ones provided for him. During the trip, there was Champagne and caviar but he never made the sale.

Finally, to his surprise, at the end of the trip, the woman bought his entire collection but not until they were back to shore.

While the founder stated that now the brand's diamonds are held in state-of-the-art facilities, at one time he held them in his pocket.

The brand also believes whole heartedly in giving back. Mr. Graff realized that in an area where they were mining the finest diamonds in the world, many of its citizens were affected by AIDs.

After this realization, the brand created the organization called FACET, Four African Children Every Time, which was the first learning center for African children in Lesoto. Around 100 orphans are fed, clothed and are taught a trade.



Mr. Graff speaks at CNI Luxury. Image credit: Cond Nast International

Following their maturation, they then teach the next generation. Mr. Graff believes there have been about 1,000 children taught.

Graff expands

British jeweler Graff also recently invested in its New York store footprint with the purchase of its longtime boutique on Madison Avenue.

Graff has been located at 710 Madison for almost two decades, but was previously renting in the five-story building. Now, the diamond brand is the owner of the building, giving it greater permanence on New York's Upper East Side ([see story](#)).

"It has taken over a year to cut," Mr. Graff said. "I'm honored to have the privilege to produce this diamond.

"Who knows what is in the ground in Africa," he said. "Who knows what is yet to come.

"I get excited about the potential of other diamonds coming, but I know that this is the largest in 100 years. Do I have to wait for another hundred years for another one? Who knows?"