

VANITY FAIR

On Jewellery

AUGUST 2013

*"Let us not be too particular.
It is better to have old second-hand
diamonds than none at all."*

—MARK TWAIN

Gemma Arterton



FAB FOUR

In the second of two features on family jewellery firms, MARIA DOULTON talks to Michael Wainwright, one of four members of the Wainwright clan who are still actively involved in running Boodles, founded in Liverpool more than two centuries ago, about change and tradition, Britishness and beyond

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAKE WALTERS



In 1798 a small jewellery shop called Boodles and Dunthorne opened its doors to the city of Liverpool. Originally the firm sold jewellery, silverware and carriage clocks to the great and the good of the city that was then the centre of Britain's textile industry and a prosperous port.

Today the firm—now simply Boodles, minus the Dunthorne—is known for its contemporary designs, often in diamonds and platinum, and has nine shops across the UK, with its flagship store bang in the middle of New Bond Street. Rubbing shoulders with Cartier, Tiffany and Van Cleef & Arpels, Boodles is one of the only British names on Bond Street where you will find the owners sitting in the office above the shop.

The firm is owned and run by the Wainwright family, who have been at the helm for six generations. Brothers Nicholas and Michael Wainwright made the key decision of opening their first London shop in 1987. "We had a good reputation as the jeweller of choice in northwest England, but saw that London was the future of our business," says managing director Michael from his office, overlooking the Ralph Lauren megastore across the street. "It was a huge step outside our comfort zone."

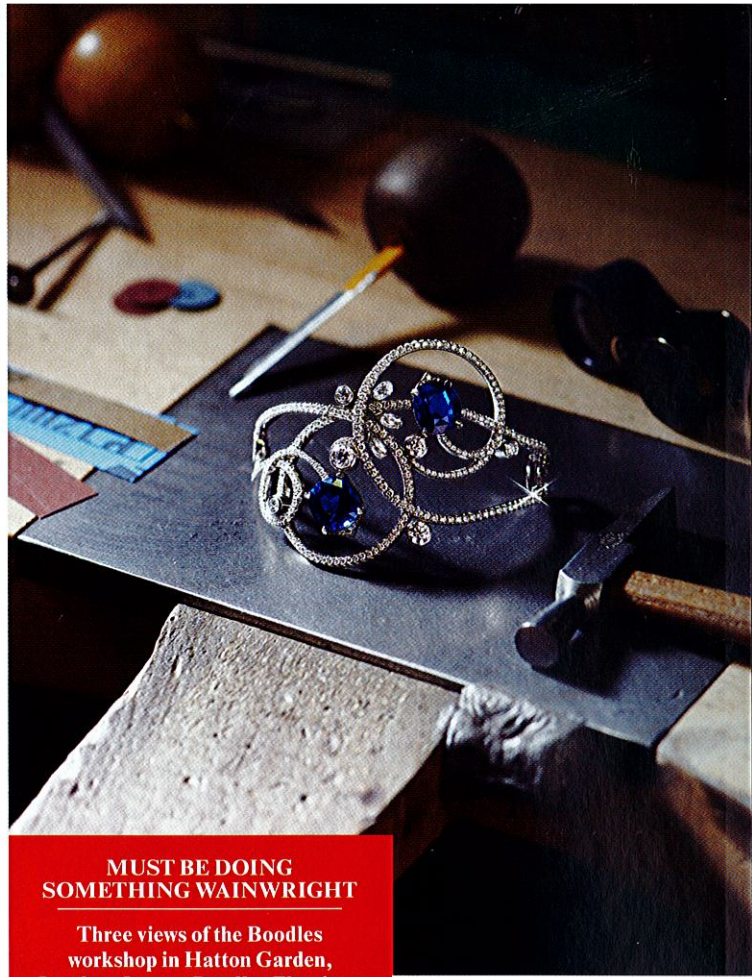
The Wainwrights are very focused on customer service, and like people to feel they are entering a family-run firm as soon as they come in the door. In an industry dominated by multinational companies, Boodles is one of the few independent firms to survive, thanks to a mix of steady perseverance, fair play and wise design decisions.

The design studio is in Liverpool but the lion's share of the jewellery is still manufactured in London. Boodles' designs are strong but not outrageous, flashy or challenging, and there is often a sense of humour in, say, a frog ring or a necklace strung with gem-set beetles.

Boodles' design talent was recognised by the Victoria & Albert Museum, which chose the firm's Raindance ring to become part of its permanent jewellery collection. The Raindance collection, dotted with random "droplets" of diamonds on a band that, though single, appears stacked, is still the firm's bestseller. The Wonderland high-end jewels are the house's most extravagant offerings, but at the same time Boodles offers brides-to-be tray after tray of engagement rings and a wide price-range of jewels.

"We used to think we were a principally British jeweller making jewels for primarily British people, but now growth is coming from overseas clients also. Even though we are now attracting more lavish clients, we won't ever lose our Britishness," affirms Wainwright. □

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MUST BE DOING SOMETHING WAINWRIGHT

Three views of the Boodles workshop in Hatton Garden, London. *Inset:* a Boodles Flamingo ring. *Opposite, from top left:* James Amos (director), Michael Wainwright (managing director), Jody Wainwright (director) and Nicholas Wainwright (chairman), on the stairs at Boodles headquarters, New Bond Street.

