

A Tribute to Diamond Royalty: Sir Gabriel “Gabi” Tolkowsky

6/16/2023

The world of diamonds is full of sparkle and glitter. Sometimes, there are people within that world with a talent and charisma equal to the most brilliant of diamonds. Sir Gabriel “Gabi” Tolkowsky was such a figure. Sadly, Gabi passed away on May 28, 2023, yet his legacy will continue as an inspirational force in the diamond cutting industry for generations to come.

Born into a family deeply rooted in the diamond industry, Gabi’s fate would forever be entwined with these precious stones. He grew up in Tel Aviv, learning the secrets of diamond cutting from his father, Jean. Their modest home would often double as an artisan studio filled with eager learners from across the globe who were drawn to the fine craftsmanship of diamond polishing. It was there that Gabriel's passion ignited, and it would be flame that would burn indelibly for a lifetime.

His father's story was an extraordinary one of resilience and innovation. Jean had ventured from Antwerp to Palestine, armed with little more than determination and a bicycle-powered polishing wheel. Those early days were filled with challenges, but Jean's teachings laid the foundation for a rare opportunity that Gabriel would seize.

Eventually, Gabriel Tolkowsky's career flourished within De Beers' renowned manufacturing unit, Diatrada. Yet, it was his groundbreaking work on the Centenary Diamond that etched his name into history.

When DeBeers announced that Tolkowsky would cut and polish the marvel stone, Gabriel and his wife sought refuge in a hidden hotel room in Cape Town, evading the prying eyes and growing whispers of the world. Consumed by the 599-ct. rough gem, he delved into its depths, seeking the perfect cut. Nights turned into weeks turned into years as he searched for answers, consumed by a diamond that seemed to gaze back at him in parallel wonder.

After three years, the diamond revealed its inner brilliance under Gabriel's skilled hands. The result, a 273.85-carat polished masterpiece forever known as the Centenary Diamond. It would go on to grace the halls of the Tower of London.

But Gabriel's legacy extended beyond the Centenary Diamond. His hands danced across many precious stones, including the awe-inspiring, 545.7-ct. Golden Jubilee Diamond which was given to King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand.

Gabriel Tolkowsky believed diamonds were not mere commodities, but vessels of emotion, each with its unique story to tell. And Gabi toiled tirelessly to uncover every tale. In a 2009 interview with the Los Angeles Times, he said, ""The first thing I do when I hold a diamond is I look at it and ask it, 'What would you like to become? It answers: 'The most beautiful.' I answer: 'Then, you will be.' That is the challenge."

Gabi's contributions to the industry garnered recognition by the Belgian government, bestowing upon him the prestigious Knighthood Chevalier de L'Ordre du Roi Leopold II.

A pioneer and master craftsman, Gabi understood the mystical allure of diamonds like few others. His passion, expertise, and artistry breathed life into stones, creating everlasting beauty.

Sir Gabriel Tolkowsky's passing on May 28, 2023, at the age of 84 has left an indelible mark upon the world of diamonds, and his absence will be deeply felt. As we honor his memory, Signet Jewelers, along with the entire diamond jewelry industry, pays tribute to a luminary who elevated the world of diamonds – an artist whose passion for Earth's natural brilliance inspired millions. The Tolkowsky family is embraced in our thoughts, for Gabi's legacy will continue to radiate through the diamonds he so lovingly brought to life.