



POWER & PURPOSE | BUSINESS

Jacques Branellec and Manuel Cojuangco Celebrate 40 Years of Excellence with Jeweler

By MJ Jose
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As Jeweler unveils the next chapter of its storied legacy, the gentlemen who founded the company look back on the past 40 years and reflect on a calling far greater than what they had imagined

The story of Jewelmer began in 1979, when a Filipino entrepreneur and a French pearl farmer sat down for a chat. Group Chairman Manuel Cojuangco owes this meeting to “an invisible beneficent hand,” for he and President and CEO Jacques Branellec did not run in the same social circles at the time. But as fate would have it, their paths crossed through a chance encounter, when Cojuangco’s brother asked him to meet with Branellec. The initial goal was to find a way to cease dependence on harvesting natural oysters by finding a way to breed their own through research and biotechnology. At the time, others around the world were attempting to do the same—there were a few close calls, but no one had succeeded. Jewelmer would be the first in the pearling industry to find a winning formula.

Oyster breeding is just the tip of the iceberg. All over the world, the company is held in high esteem as the purveyor of the finest golden South Sea pearls, which are produced by the gold-lipped *Pinctada maxima* oysters bred in Jewelmer’s sustainable eco pearl farms in Palawan. A meeting with a jeweller—another fortuitous event, according to Cojuangco—inspired the gentlemen to expand the business by utilising their raw materials to create their own pieces. “We realised that we had an opportunity to create unique designs that may not yet exist, allowing us to dictate trends in the jewellery industry,” says Branellec. “It was imperative that we made a strong impact, not just because we were establishing a brand, but because we had the opportunity to show the world that the Philippines had the potential to become an able player in the luxury market.”



ABOVE Jeweler's first ever US-based brick and mortar, located along Palm Beach in Florida

An exhibition at a museum in Monaco is particularly memorable for the gentlemen. In retrospect, it may also have been the kick starter to truly get things moving for them, at least, where jewellery was concerned. “Jeweler, the new kid on the block, was one of only two Asian companies there,” Cojuangco recalls. “Because of where they placed us, people may have gotten the impression that we were bigger than we were. It was quite exciting; we certainly weren’t complaining!”

2006 found Branellec and Cojuangco adding yet another feather to Jeweler’s proverbial hat—this time, establishing its corporate social responsibility arm, the Save Palawan Seas Foundation (SPSF). Through this foundation, the company works closely with the local government and related non-profit organisations to provide a better quality of life to the communities in Palawan by introducing sustainable livelihood practices as well as developing and implementing strategies for

the protection of marine resources. This arm of the business is near and dear to the co-founders' hearts, as this island, often called "the last frontier" of the Philippines, and its inhabitants that are in their employ are the core of the Jeweler brand.

"We have been active on the environmental front since we began, spreading awareness and initiating discussions on preservation and rehabilitation," shares Branellec. "Palawan is the largest marine protected area in the Philippines, and we are adamant about looking after it because it is under threat. The response to the foundation's programmes has been extremely positive; moving forward, we will be even more concentrated in our efforts: beefing up resources, expanding our reach, and involving more communities."



PHOTO 1 OF 5 Berlingot Pendant

In celebration of its 40th anniversary, Jeweler, as a brand that is constantly evolving, re-examines its identity—of course, without compromising the roots on which it was built—and forging a strong, cohesive character that brings together all facets that make it what it is. It introduces its new modernised emblem, a reflection of where the company is now: a distinctive J (the tail of which replicates the shape of the pearl) at the centre of a sleek octagon, which symbolises the eight pearl farms. The gold streak in the octagon’s inner outline is a nod to the *Pinctada maxima* oyster.

Jeweler boutiques across the globe will be given facelifts to better reflect the company’s new look. Its first ever US brick and mortar, located along Worth Avenue, Palm Beach in Florida, which formally opened in February this year, sports the updated design. At the event, Jeweler unveiled stunning pieces from the Riviera, Berlingot, Elixir d’Amour, and La Mer en Majeste collections, which were also unveiled at its 40th anniversary gala in the Philippines.

Jeweler unveils a radiant new universe



ABOVE In celebration of Jeweler’s 40th anniversary, and for the first time in the brand’s long and storied history, it proudly unveils a brand new identity—one that is in line with both its esteemed heritage and its pioneering vision.

“In retrospect, 40 years is such a long time—and what a journey it has been. We are still here because of the people who have worked tirelessly by our sides,” Cojuangco says. Hands-on not

just when it comes to business matters, they also establish close personal relationships with their employees, personally interviewing everyone that joins the company. There have been occasions on which their resources have been wiped out by typhoons; to the point where they would have to start from scratch. And kindness truly is a two-way street, for it would be the employees that would rally around them, willing to put in the work so they can begin again. “Without that kind of attitude, we would not have the strength to move forward,” adds Cojuangco. “We are so intertwined with our people that even if we could disengage, we would never want to because they have become family. It’s a heavy responsibility to bear, but one that is also a blessing. The company could go any which way in the future, but those that will take over the reins must continue to foster this spirit.”

Concludes Branellec, “If you ask us what keeps us going, it is that we are motivated to share the best of the Philippines to the world. Unfortunately, it is easy to show the negative aspects, and, consequently, difficult to show what is good. And we take pride in contributing to this goodness. Our mission has grown much more complex than what we had envisioned in the beginning. We have never been motivated by money; rather, by how much respect and prestige our business will bring to the Philippines. And this is our greatest pride.”

Credits

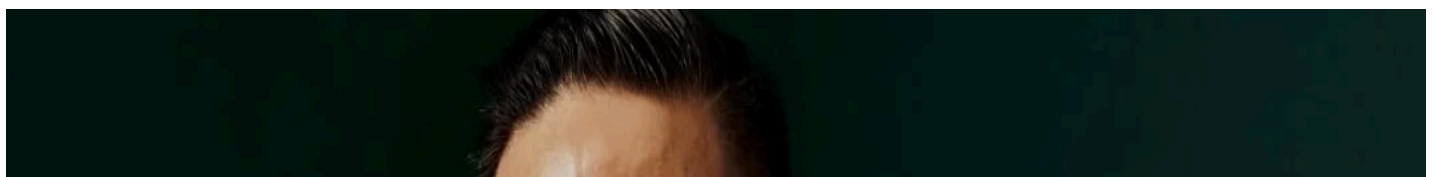
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By Franz Sorilla IV

May 03, 2024





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