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Crown Jewel

THE TIFFANY DIAMOND IS COMING TO TOWN

BY NOA NICHOL

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Actually, it's already here, and it can't be missed. The cushion-shaped brilliant-cut yellow diamond—the "crown jewel" of Tiffany & Co.'s permanent collection of precious stones—travelled to Vancouver "under the cloak of darkness" last month, and will remain here until January 4 for your viewing pleasure (sorry, it's not for sale). We sat down with the brand's charming chief gemologist, Melvyn Kirtley, who revealed the story behind this extraordinary gem, and explained why we should all seize the opportunity to see it ... before it's gone.

What is the story behind this spectacular diamond?

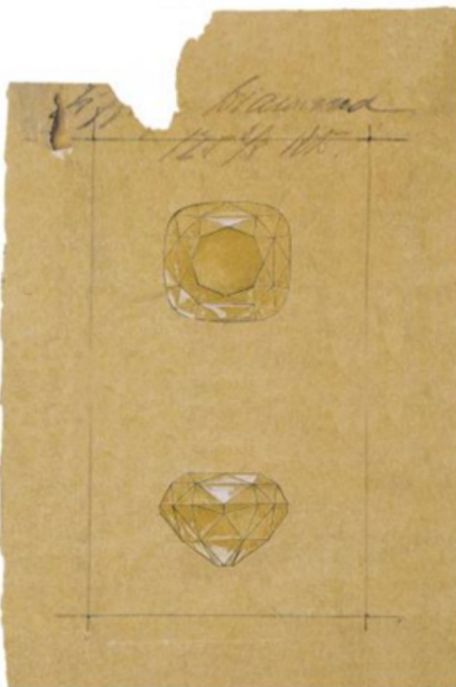
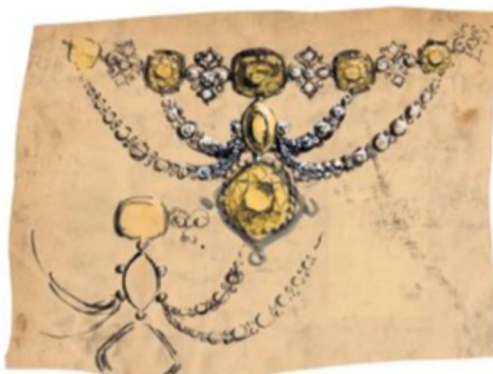
Well, of course, it was a piece of rock in the earth billions of years ago but, in 1877, it was found in the Kimberley Mine in South Africa—a very large rough of 287 carats. Charles Lewis Tiffany purchased it for \$18,000, at a time when he was building the Tiffany brand. Now, you have to bump that up against the fact that, in America, people weren't wearing diamonds; they were really only available to European royalty and very well-heeled upper-class nobility. He made a very audacious move in buying that rough diamond for an enormous amount of money and cutting it, hoping that it would yield something special. It was then sent to Paris where it was studied for about a year and then cut under the supervision of George Frederick Kunz, our chief gemologist at the time. Out of that original 287 carats came an incredible diamond weighing 128 carats that had the most remarkable internal yellow body colour and this smouldering way of capturing the light, hanging onto it and giving it back in a very controlled manner. The cut itself was quite unique at the time, too: more than 80 facets, and a diamond of that size had never before been cut to that exacting proportion and facet arrangement, it was quite a novel cut and, even today, it still looks incredibly fresh, like it was cut just yesterday.

What is your personal relationship with the Tiffany Diamond?

I've had a 30-year relationship with the diamond, so I feel like I'm married to it. A very close relationship indeed—I get to look at it, examine it, check it, handle it. Of course, most of the time it's in its very special display case, which is a vault as well. Years ago we had a different way of displaying it on the New York main floor, and I used to cradle it in and out of its display case every night like a baby.

What has the diamond's "evolution of settings" looked like?

For many years it sat simply in four prongs with a rod at the back that we used to mount it to a receptacle inside a display case. Then a young designer, Jean Schlumberger, came along and mounted it as a "Bird on a Rock" brooch for an exhibition at the Louvre, which is a very whimsical design. Imagine, one of the most valuable diamonds in the world, with a quirky bird sitting on top about to pick it up and take flight. It was fabulous! After that it was reset in another Schlumberger design—a necklace of diamond ribbons that Audrey Hepburn wore for publicity photos for *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. In 2012, for Tiffany's 175th anniversary, it was reset in its current setting: a



necklace of dazzling white diamonds totalling more than 120 carats. The necklace was a year in the making, and appeared at celebrations in Tokyo, Beijing, Dubai and New York. And now, finally, here it is, in Vancouver.

Has it ever been up for sale?

We did, once, put it up for sale for 24 hours in a quirky, tongue-in-cheek ad in the *New York Times*. The asking price was \$5 million. Thank goodness no one took us up on it!

Will it ever be up for sale again?

No, I highly doubt it. It's about as permanent a part of our collection as permanent can be in this world.

Who has worn this diamond?

The actress Audrey Hepburn, as I mentioned, wore it in a Schlumberger design. Other than that, only one other woman has worn the Tiffany Diamond: a Mrs. Mary Whitehouse, who wore a lavish necklace set with the diamond for the 1957 charity Tiffany Ball in Newport, Rhode Island.

So why Vancouver, why now?

Vancouver's such a wonderful and diverse city. We have just invested in this new store—it's in our old location, of course, but it's unrecognizable from how it was prior. Not to mention, the Vancouver boutique is an important flagship for us. So to bring the diamond here was a wonderful decision to make. Vancouver is extremely worthy of that kind of unique importance. The synergy really is there.

Why should Vancouverites not miss the opportunity to see it?

The Tiffany Diamond is a very special thing to experience. It beckons you from afar—in simply walking past the store you will notice it. It's mesmerizing. Besides the fact that it has a wonderful personality and character—even beyond its extraordinary size, shape and colour—people are intrinsically attracted to beautiful diamonds. There's a natural reaction; it sparks a lot of emotion. And this particular diamond is one of the most special because every time you look at it you see something different. It's really, really remarkable. 723 Burrard St., 604-630-1300. Tiffany.ca



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