



# SELLING THE FAMILY JEWELS

BY RACHEL CORBETT



**ON A SLOW DAY**, Chris Del Gatto might see just twenty pieces come through the New York headquarters of Circa, the largest public jewelry buying firm in the world. But not surprisingly, business has been up these days, and now Del Gatto may see upwards of 300 pieces—entire estate collections, 25-carat diamonds, or signed costume jewelry. *Quest* spoke with Del Gatto about the emotional side of buying jewelry in a down market.

**Q: How has the recession affected Circa's jewelry buying?**

**A:** We are seeing a lot of people selling jewelry that's less important to them emotionally, that they're not wearing on a regular

basis, because now all of a sudden they have chances to do other things with their money—to buy real estate at a price they want, for example. Now the money's more important than jewelry that's been sitting in the vault for a year or two. We're seeing people thinking of going back into the stock market in early or mid '09, so they're looking at their own portfolios that have been affected, and are using the money from to invest and get ahead.

**Q: Has Bernie Madoff been good for business?**

**A:** We're hearing from clients almost daily from all over the country that have stories to tell about Madoff. They're not all

selling, but they want information. I'm sure they're having their houses and art appraised too. We're getting a tremendous number of phone calls with people asking things like, "If I lost fifty percent with this guy, what do I have left? What's it worth?"

**Q: How do you handle the emotional ties clients may have have to their jewelry?**

**A:** One of the founding principles of Circa is that the source of the product is the general public. When you're buying it there, there's going to be an attachment. Before Circa, there really wasn't an upscale, elegant place someone could go—and I don't mean just a wealthy person—where you weren't going because you needed the money. No matter who comes in the door, it can be for \$80 or \$800,000, they are treated correctly, with an understanding that often the things they're selling were their mother's or their ex-husband's. It's kind of like giving away a pet. Clients say to us all the time, "we're so glad it's going to nice people."

We often see siblings who are settling their parents estate, and of course it's a cathartic process. A fairly typical scenario is that the father passed away several years ago and now the mother has just passed, so they're in the process of liquidating everything—the house, the contents of the house, and then the jewelry. We talk to them about how they came about these pieces, if it's a wonderful piece we often educate the client, and if there's not a lot of monetary value, but the emotional value is strong, we may tell them that it's not worth selling.

**Q: Who's actually buying right now?**

**A:** We are the largest buyer from the public in the world so we've got collectors who flock to us and regular businesses who still need commercial jewelry from us. Some businesses have slowed,

but because we're such a large buyer, we're typically the single most important source for those people that buy from us.

**Q: How is the international demand?**

**A:** We still have demand in the U.S., London, and Geneva. Dubai and Moscow have been hurt, but we still have demand there. Don't forget, in the last twenty-five years more wealth has been created in this country than anywhere else in the world, ever. Sure, big chunks been wiped out, but there's a lot on the sidelines. A lot of wealthy people aren't parading their money down Madison because they don't want to seem insensitive, but people are still buying—the've just become more value driven.

**Q: What do you hope to project into the market in the future?**

**A:** I want to change the way people look at selling their jewelry. If there's one thing I want to project into the marketplace, it's that I want people to know that, certainly when they're dealing with Circa, selling your jewelry does not mean you need the money—we don't treat people that way, we don't price things that way. Years ago, you'd go into the pawn shop and ask the guy with the visor on, "How much do you want for this thing?"

If you're financially savvy, and you've got jewelry you're not really wearing, you know it's a liability. You're either paying insurance on it and it's costing you or you're not paying insurance and it's truly a liability. Make an investment, you'd be much better off with the money. ♦

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*Stendhal's unreturned affection for an Italian Baroness culminated in his 1822 book De l'Amour, an analysis of "that sickness of the soul called love." dhal's unreturned affection for an Italian Baroness culminated in his 1822 book De l'Amour, an analysis of "that sickness of the*

