



## Gemstone investment

'Glorified treasure hunter', entrepreneur **Sophie Marquis**, talks to Amanda Eulenkamp about her gemstone and fine art advisory service, Marquis

SETTING up Marquis Ltd. was 'something that I always knew I wanted to do', according to Sophie, a vivacious young woman whose enthusiasm for her subject spills out in every sentence. After leaving Durham University with a degree in Art History & Economics, she gained a Masters in Fine & Decorative Art specialising in Impressionist paintings and Chinese porcelain at Sotheby's. She made career choices to explore the paths in the art world and finance sector that consolidated her knowledge and she cheerfully admits that her favourite film, *The Thomas Crown Affair*, influenced her to undertake a role in the Art & Antiques Unit at Scotland Yard.

'I thought "I'd love to be Rene Russo", but it's really not that glamorous,' she laughs.

Sophie's interest in jewellery developed after an impressive diamond collection was consigned to the auction house where she was a specialist. Discovering this passion, she qualified to become a Fellow of the Gemmological Association of Great Britain and decided to go into luxury retail. 'It was rewarding working with private collectors and amassing their collections to bring them joy and protect their wealth,' she says. 'I was approached with the opportunity to return to London and run the UK office for a European auction house, which was valuable experience sourcing Picasso and Damien Hirst artworks.'

Returning to Guernsey to work in luxury watch and jewellery retail, 'I had amazing experiences like visiting Baselworld, the Rolex factory and going on F1 Red Bull track days with TAG Heuer'. The approach of a significant birthday was what Sophie needed to nudge her into setting up her own company.

'I thought "it's now or never", I wanted to found the business on real life experience by exploring important gemstone centres and was fortunate to visit Kilimanjaro. I had to pinch myself, to think that I was actually down a Tanzanite mine.'

A highlight of her travels took her to the Luc Yen gemstone market on the Vietnamese/Chinese border. 'It was a privilege to be greeted by women. Visiting that market was probably the first time in my involvement in the gemstone industry that I'd been anywhere run by women. It was so rewarding communicating with them as they didn't speak English and I didn't speak Vietnamese. Through smiles and gestures – and a calculator – we were able to negotiate on rubies and spinels.'

Travelling and immersing herself in what the industry is about and meeting the people that make it special gave Sophie a real understanding of the value that's in gemstones.

She says that even during her time in the industry, more trailblazing women have become involved, and it's becoming less male-dominated.

On establishing Marquis, she says 'I wanted to create a service that acts as a focal point for luxury consultancy on Guernsey, from sourcing diamonds and gemstones for portfolios, to providing insurance valuations, vetting antiques, brokering paintings and creating beautiful bespoke jewellery. It was important for me that the products are socially conscious, having a positive impact on gemstone communities worldwide.'

On being an entrepreneur, Sophie says it's 'a daily mix of fear and exhilaration'.

'I have no regrets at all. I think it takes a while to get to that stage [running your own business] where you jump off that diving board. One of the best things I've read was: "What would you attempt to do if you knew you could not fail?". An entrepreneur has to trust their intuition, have a mix of bravery and courage, plus a strong sense of belief in yourself and the conviction of your vision. You've got to be open to growth, which means being prepared to fail and taking those lessons from it; using it as an opportunity to move forward.'

'You've got to have that determination to keep going. And be committed and focused even when it's tough, or things don't necessarily go the way that you thought they were, like we've had with Covid.'

Living in a volatile world as we currently are, Sophie says that gemstones are presenting themselves as being a tangible safe haven. 'They are a diversified asset that really represents a solid protected value. They're not a speculative monetary instrument.'

She adds that 2020 was incredibly successful for the business, which has evolved rapidly and has had to be nimble enough to adapt to Covid and changing perceptions to looking at alternative investments. 'I'm already looking at outsourcing and developing new collaborations which, as an entrepreneur, it is so important to harness the power of your community.'

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