
HARRY WINSTON: A STORY TOLD IN DIAMONDS

By Laurence S. Krashes

In conjunction with the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Harry Winston, Inc., the author has investigated and updated many of the "named" diamonds handled by the late Harry Winston during his long career. Fourteen of the more interesting pieces are described here, some for the first time.

Fifty years ago, the now-legendary Harry Winston founded the jewelry firm that bears his name today. The specialty of Harry Winston, Inc., is diamonds. But not just diamonds: Some of the most important diamonds in the history of gemology were cut, bought, or sold by Harry Winston.

As part of our celebration of the firm's 50th anniversary, we have gone through the files at Harry Winston, Inc., to update and expand the reports on those stones that originally appeared in the *GIA Diamond Dictionary* (Copeland, 1964), and to add material that has surfaced recently to the public record. The following account is provided to introduce the personage of Harry Winston and to bring up to date some of the "named" diamonds whose history now bears his imprint.

HARRY WINSTON, 1896-1978

Called by some the "king of diamonds" (Tupper, 1947) and by others "the Tavernier of the 20th century," Harry Winston was indeed the most prominent diamond merchant of his time. Like the 17th-century French gem dealer and adventurer Tavernier, Mr. Winston traveled all over the world in search of the biggest and best in diamonds and other fine gems.

Born in New York, Harry Winston started in the jewelry trade at the age of 15 in Los Angeles, where his father had moved for his health and had subsequently opened a jewelry store on Figueroa Street. A resourceful purveyor of gems even in his early years, Mr. Winston would carry his father's wares from one saloon to the next, selling to newly affluent oil prospectors.

This resourcefulness became a hallmark of his business acumen when he returned to New York with his father. Still only in his late teens, Mr. Winston used the \$2,000 he had saved while in California to set up a one-man firm, the Premier Diamond Company, in a small

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The diamond histories recounted here will appear together with the stories of many other named diamonds in an upcoming book about Harry Winston by Mr. Krashes.

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office at 535 Fifth Avenue. Recognizing the difficulties of breaking into the tightly controlled diamond market, he decided to look beyond the conventional sources of fine gems to the then unconventional: estate jewelry.

The key to the success of this venture was to establish good working relationships with the bankers in his area. Harry Winston got off to a shaky start, however. With a jaunty cap on his head, he arrived late at his first loan hearing. The bankers took the young man (only 5'1" tall) for a messenger boy, and he was ordered to return to his boss with the message that the man was to appear in person if he expected to get his money. Mr. Winston finally got the loan, but for several years thereafter he was accompanied to such meetings by a tall, white-haired, distinguished-looking gentleman, who handled the formalities while Mr. Winston quietly guided the transactions.

Eventually, the bankers grew both to admire Mr. Winston's knowledge of diamonds and trust his judgment, thus firmly establishing him in the banking community. Using the *Social Register* and *Who's Who*, he proceeded to offer his services to the wealthy in the disposition of fine jewelry. Within five years after he opened his one-man company, Harry Winston was involved in transactions in which as much as a million dollars changed hands (Ross, 1954).

Among the estates Harry Winston handled were Arabella Huntington (widow of the railroad magnate Collis P. Huntington, and later of his nephew, H. E. Huntington), Emma T. Gary (widow of the former chairman of the board at U.S. Steel, Judge Elbert T. Gary), Mrs. I. W. Killam (the wife of a Canadian financier, whose jewelry included the Briolette of India as well as the Crown of Charlemagne diamond), and socialite Evalyn Walsh McLean (owner of the Hope diamond and the Star of the East).

Over the years, Mr. Winston also purchased and had cut some of the finest rough stones to emerge from the ground, including the Jonker, the Niarchos, the Winston, the Star of Independence, and the Star of Sierra Leone diamonds. His customers spanned royalty as well as leading business and professional figures the world over. And his love of beautiful jewels was such that he would go virtually anywhere to find them.

With the death of Harry Winston in 1978, management of the company passed into the ca-

pable hands of his son, Ronald, who now oversees over a thousand employees in a dozen countries. The tradition on which the House of Winston was built continues. The "named" diamonds that follow represent but a small portion of this tradition.

THE ARCOTS

These two pear-shaped diamonds, which originally weighed a total of 57.35 ct, were first recorded as having been given to Queen Charlotte of England in 1777 by the Nawab of Azim-uduala, ruler of Arcot, India.

On Charlotte's death in 1818, she specifically named the Arcot diamonds in her will, directing that they be sold for the benefit of her four surviving daughters. Purchased by Rundell, Bridges & Co., Crown Jewellers, the stones were held by that firm until 1927, when, as part of the sale of the company, they were offered at auction in London. The Duke of Westminster bought them for £11,000* and subsequently had them set in earrings for his duchess.

In 1930, the Parisian jeweler Lacloche mounted the Arcots in the so-called family headpiece of the Westminsters, together with 1,421 smaller diamonds and a 26.77-ct central round diamond. In June 1959, the third Duke of Westminster decided to sell the headpiece, including the Arcots, at Sotheby's. In one of the largest single-item sales up to that time, ownership of the headpiece was transferred to Harry Winston for \$308,000. Mr. Winston removed the two Arcot Diamonds and had them recut so that each would be flawless. The 33.70-ct pear shape was recut to 31.01 ct and sold as a ring in 1959; the 23.65-ct pear shape was recut to 18.85 ct and sold as a ring in 1960.

THE BRIOLETTE OF INDIA

This legendary 90.38-ct diamond (figure 1) may be the oldest on record, perhaps older than the Koh-i-Noor. Legend states that in the 12th century Eleanor of Aquitaine, the first Queen of France and later Queen of England, brought the stone to England. Her son, Richard the Lionhearted, is said to have taken it on the Third Crusade. Word of the stone next appeared in the 16th century, when Henry II of France gave it to his mistress, Diane

*Editor's note: It is the policy of *Gems & Gemology* not to quote the current prices of gemstones. Prices on the named diamonds described here are included only as part of the historical record of these unique pieces.



Figure 1. *The Briolette of India, a 90.38-ct stone that may be the oldest faceted diamond on record.*



Figure 2. *The original Bruce Winston diamond, a 59.25-ct emerald cut.*

de Poitiers. It can be seen in one of the many portraits of her that were painted while she resided at Fontainebleau.

After disappearing for four centuries, the stone surfaced again in 1950, when Harry Winston purchased it from an Indian maharaja. It was then sold to Mrs. I. W. Killam of Canada and later repurchased by Mr. Winston following her death about 10 years later. The Briolette of India was sold again in Europe in 1971.

THE BRUCE WINSTON HEART SHAPE

In 1969, Harry Winston fashioned a 59.25-ct emerald cut (figure 2) and five smaller diamonds from a piece of rough that weighed 205.70 ct. The large emerald cut was sold in 1970 and repurchased by Harry Winston, Inc., in 1980. At that time, to improve the quality of the diamond, the firm had the stone recut to a unique heart shape of 40.97 ct (figure 3). It was sold that same year to a client in Europe.

THE DEAL SWEETENER

In 1974, Harry Winston and Harry Oppenheimer, head of the DeBeers Consolidated Mines, Ltd., concluded an agreement whereby Harry Winston would purchase a lot of rough diamonds for \$24,500,000. The transaction—the largest individual sale of diamonds in history—took less than a minute. When Mr. Winston asked Mr. Oppenheimer, "How about a little something to sweeten the deal," Harry Oppenheimer pulled a 180.80-ct rough diamond out of his pocket and rolled it across the table. Harry Winston picked the stone up, smiled, and said, simply, "Thanks."

This piece of rough was cut into five gem diamonds. The largest was a D-flawless 45.31-ct emerald cut, which was aptly christened "The Deal Sweetener." The others were an emerald-cut diamond of 24.67 ct and three pear-shaped diamonds of 10.80 ct, 4.19 ct, and 1.45 ct, respectively. All of these stones were sold that same year to clients of the firm.



Figure 3. The Bruce Winston diamond recut to a 40.97-ct heart shape.

THE HOPE

The 45.52-ct dark-blue Indian stone known as the Hope (figure 4) is undoubtedly one of the world's most famous diamonds, with a history heavily veiled by superstition and tragedy.

Jean Tavernier, the French adventurer and gem merchant, discovered the rough diamond (called, in its rough state, the Tavernier Blue and believed to have weighed about 112 ct) in southwest India in 1642. He subsequently brought the stone to France, where, Winston records indicate, King Louis XIV gave him a title and a fortune for it. But Tavernier's son squandered the fortune, and legend has it that when the old man, at 80, returned to India in quest of new wealth, he was killed by wild dogs.

Tavernier was only one of the many who legend claims handled the lovely blue gemstone and later suffered grave misfortunes. Louis XIV, who had a 69.03-ct stone cut from Tavernier's blue rough, supposedly wore the diamond only once, and shortly thereafter died from smallpox. Louis XV never wore the Great Blue, as it was then called. He did loan it to one of his mistresses, Countess DuBarry, who was beheaded in the French Revolution. It was passed down to Louis XVI and worn by his queen, Marie Antoinette; they, too, were both beheaded. Princess de Lamballe, a friend of Marie Antoinette, also was said to have worn it; she was killed by a mob during the French Revolution.

The diamond was stolen from the French Treasury in 1792. Recut to 45.52 ct, it turned up in London in 1830 and was purchased by Henry Philip Hope, a banker, for £18,000. Henry Hope died without marrying. The nephew to whom he left the stone in 1839 (Henry Thomas Hope) subsequently willed it to his grandson—the son of his daughter—on the condition that he adopt the official name of Hope. In 1894, the new Lord Hope married May Yohe, an American actress, who later had a glass model made of the large blue stone for a stage comeback, which proved unsuccessful. Lord Hope subsequently went bankrupt and his wife left him for another man. (May Yohe died in Boston in the 1940s; her only income at the time was a \$16.50-a-week WPA job. She blamed the diamond for her bad luck.) In 1906, Lord Hope reportedly was forced to sell the Hope diamond to help pay off his debts. During the next few years, the Hope changed hands several times.

In 1908, the diamond was purchased by Sultan Abdul Hamid II of Turkey for \$400,000. Legend continues that the dealer who handled the transaction was thrown over a precipice while motor-ing with his wife and child, and all were killed. And that in Turkey, it was worn by Zobeida, the Sultan's favorite, who later was executed by her master.

In 1911, Pierre Cartier acquired the Hope in Paris and sold it for \$154,000 to Edward B. McLean, then owner of the Washington Post, as a gift for his wife. Despite the diamond's previous history, Mrs. McLean laughed at the legend that had grown around it. She often wore the Hope at parties with her 94.80-ct pear-shaped diamond, the Star of the East. When she was not wearing these

Figure 4. The legendary 45.52-ct Hope diamond was donated to the Smithsonian Institution by Harry Winston. Photo © 1981 Harold & Erica Van Pelt—Photographers, Los Angeles.



two superb stones, Mrs. McLean kept them in her favorite hiding place: the cushions of her sofa. Perhaps it is just coincidence that in the years after Mrs. McLean acquired the Hope, her son was killed in an automobile accident, her husband died, and her daughter, Mrs. Robert R. Reynolds, was the victim of an overdose of sleeping pills.

Following Mrs. McLean's death in 1947, Harry Winston purchased her entire jewelry collection. In 1958, he presented the Hope diamond to the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, as a gift to the nation.

Mr. Winston, it should be added, demonstrated little concern about the infamy that surrounded the Hope diamond and carried it with him across the Atlantic on several occasions. He especially enjoyed recounting the following story about his personal experience with the legend of the Hope:

A few years ago I traveled to Lisbon with my wife. Since our two sons were quite young at the time, we decided to return home on separate planes, as people with children often do. It was arranged that my wife would leave Lisbon for New York on the Friday evening, and that I would take a plane on the following day. My wife's plane took off on schedule, and landed at Santa Maria (in the Azores) for the usual refueling. There some slight engine trouble caused a delay of two or three hours. While waiting for repairs to be done, the passengers chatted among themselves, and the fact that Mrs. Harry Winston was on the plane was soon known to all. One man went as far as to refuse to continue the journey and asked to be booked on the next plane.

On the way to the airport the next day I was handed a cablegram from my wife announcing her safe arrival. I hastily crammed it into my pocket with other papers. Climbing aboard the plane, I took a sedative and settled down, glad to notice that the adjacent seat was vacant and I could sleep in peace. I awoke from a pleasant nap when we touched down at Santa Maria to refuel, and got out to stretch my legs for a while.

When we reboarded the plane to take off for New York, I found that the seat that had been vacant was now occupied. Its occupant was bubbling over with a story about his escape from traveling on the same plane as the wife of the owner of the 'Hope diamond.'

'I'm not superstitious,' he said, 'but why should I tempt fate? I decided then and there to change planes and here I am, safe and sound.'

He talked animatedly for some time, but eventually grew quiet enough for me to drop off to sleep again. Then his voice broke in on my slumber: 'I wonder if that plane arrived safely?'

I couldn't resist it. I fished the cablegram from my pocket and handed it to him, saying nothing. He gazed dumbly at me, and didn't open his mouth again that night.

THE JONKER

In January 1934, a 726-ct diamond was found in an alluvial deposit on the farm of Jacobus Jonker at Elandesfontein, near Pretoria, Republic of South Africa. The stone was of unusually fine color and purity. It was purchased by the Diamond Producers Association for \$315,000 and later sold to Harry Winston for a reported \$700,000. A marquise and 11 emerald cuts were fashioned from it.

The largest stone, called the Jonker diamond, was a 66-facet emerald cut that weighed 142.90 ct; it was recut in 1937 to 125.65 ct with 58 facets, to give it a more oblong outline.

The Jonker was sold to Farouk while he was still King of Egypt. After he went into exile in 1952, the location of the stone became a mystery until 1959, when rumors appeared that Queen Ratna of Nepal was wearing it. It has since been confirmed that the late Farouk did sell the great diamond to the little country in the Himalayas for a reputed \$100,000. In 1974, the Jonker was sold in Hong Kong to an unidentified businessman for US\$4,000,000.

The next two largest stones were emerald cuts that weighed 41.30 ct and 30.70 ct, respectively. They were both sold in 1940. The 30.70-ct stone was repurchased by Mr. Winston in 1951 and sold again in 1952.

The Maharaja of Kapurthala bought two of the smaller diamonds cut from this same piece of rough, and the other seven were purchased by private gem collectors. The smallest of the 11 stones cut from the original piece of Jonker rough was sold in October 1975, at the Sotheby Parke Bernet auction in New York, for \$570,000.

THE NIARCHOS

A 426.50-ct diamond of exceptionally fine color was found in the Premier Mine, Republic of South Africa, in 1954. At the time, the late Sir Ernest Oppenheimer (Chairman of De Beers Consolidated Mines, Ltd., the owner of the Premier Mine)

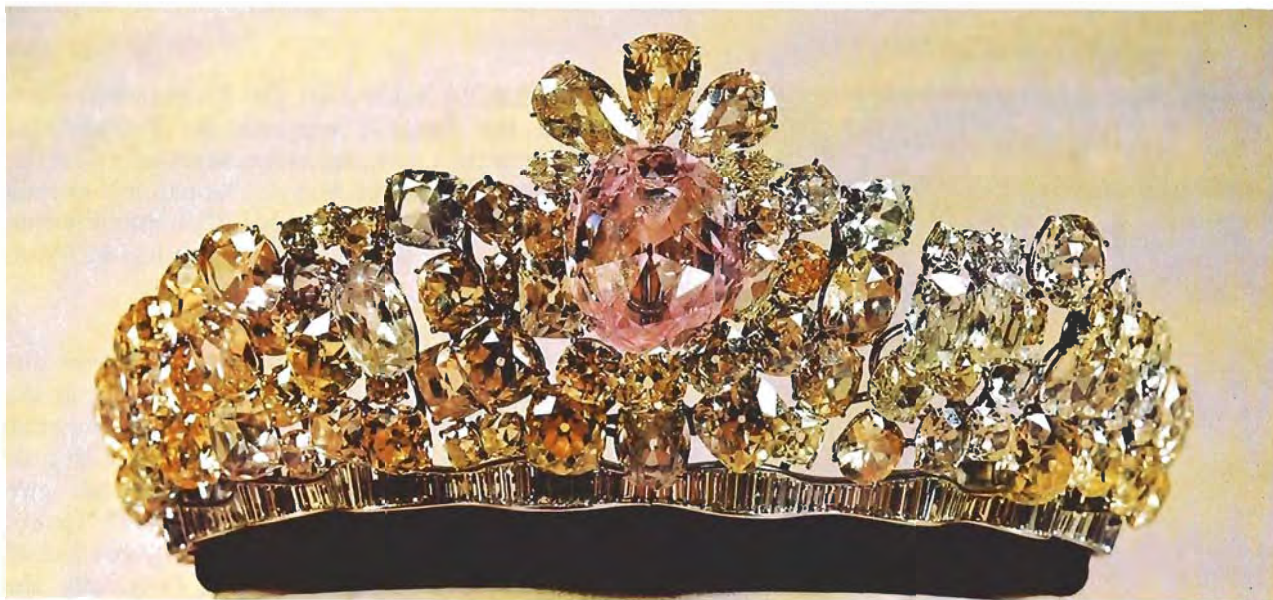


Figure 5. The Nur-ul-Ain tiara. The name, which means "Light of the Eye," is derived from the central stone in the piece, an approximately 60-ct oval rose-pink diamond. Photo by Varouj Yazejian, Photo Vahe, Tehran.

valued it at \$300,000. In 1956, this piece of rough was sold to Harry Winston as part of an \$8,400,000 parcel. Mr. Winston had it cut into a 128.25-ct D-flawless pear-shaped diamond with 58 facets on the crown and pavilion and 86 facets around the girdle. In 1957, the large stone was purchased by Stavros S. Niarchos, Greek shipbuilder and industrialist, for a reputed \$2,000,000. A 40-ct emerald cut and a 30-ct marquise were also obtained from the same rough.

NUR-UL-AIN TIARA

On the occasion of the marriage of his late Imperial Majesty Muhammad Reza Pahlavi Aryamihr Shahanshah and the Shanbanou Farah of Iran in 1958, several important pieces of jewelry were created by Harry Winston. The Nur-ul-Ain tiara (figure 5) ranks among the finest pieces in the world. The name *Nur-ul-Ain*, which means "Light of the Eye," refers to the central diamond of the tiara, an approximately 60-ct stone that is considered the largest oval rose-pink diamond in the world.

The Nur-ul-Ain is thought to have been cut from the original Darya-i Nur (meaning "Sea of Light"). The Darya-i Nur, perhaps the most celebrated stone of the Iranian Crown Jewels, is a crudely fashioned 176-ct rectangular pink diamond. Reportedly, the Nur-ul-Ain and Darya-i Nur, as we currently know them, were both fashioned from the same 300-ct faceted stone (known

historically as the Darya-i Nur) in 1934 (Meen and Tushingham; 1968). The original Darya-i Nur was said to have been in the possession of the first Mogul emperor of India. In 1739, Nadir Shah of Persia invaded India and sacked the capital of Delhi. The treasure of over 1,000 years of Indian history, including the Darya-i Nur, was then brought to Persia.

The Nur-ul-Ain is mounted in platinum surrounded by yellow, pink, blue, and colorless diamonds above a border of undulating baguettes. Among the many additional treasures in this tiara are a 10-ct yellow pear-shaped diamond directly above the Nur-ul-Ain, and a cushion-cut pink diamond of approximately 19 ct on the left top of the tiara.

THE STAR OF THE EAST

The Star of the East is believed to have been originally the Ahmedabad, a 157.25-ct rough diamond purchased in India in the mid-17th century by Tavernier, the French gem merchant. He later had it cut to a 94.78-ct pear shape and reportedly disposed of it in Persia. It then resurfaced in the 19th century in the possession of Sultan Abdul Hamid II of Turkey, who also owned the Hope diamond. In 1908, the Star of the East was purchased by Mrs. Evalyn Walsh McLean, who later acquired the Hope as well.

Harry Winston acquired the Star of the East from Mrs. McLean's estate in 1949, and in 1951



Figure 6. *The Star of Independence*, a 75.52-ct D-flawless diamond fashioned in the spring of 1976 from a 204.10-ct piece of rough.

he sold it to King Farouk of Egypt for \$1,000,000. At the time of Farouk's overthrow (1952), the stone still had not been paid for. It took Mr. Winston several years of litigation to obtain access to a safe deposit box in Switzerland to reclaim the Star of the East.

The stone was resold in 1969. In 1977, the owner asked Mr. Winston to remount the diamond to be worn as a pendant to a V-shaped diamond necklace. Two D-flawless pear-shaped diamond drops of 28 ct each can also be attached to the necklace. The Star of the East may be worn as a drop to a fabulous dog collar of 142 round diamonds, weighing a total of 173.78 ct, as well.

THE STAR OF INDEPENDENCE

In 1975, Harry Winston purchased an extraordinary piece of rough weighing 204.10 ct. The rough was cut into a 75.52-ct D-flawless, pear-shaped diamond (figure 6) in the spring of 1976. In honor of the American Bicentennial, it was named the Star of Independence.

Within 24 hours after the faceting was completed, the diamond was sold for \$4,000,000—making it the most expensive diamond sold up to that time. It was set as a pendant to a V-shaped necklace with 38 pear-shaped diamonds totaling 29 ct and 35 round diamonds totaling 31.50 ct.

THE STAR OF SIERRA LEONE

This, the third largest rough diamond ever discovered, was found on February 14, 1972, at the separator plant of the Diminco Mine at Yengema, Sierra Leone. At 969.80 ct, it is the largest alluvial diamond ever discovered. Harry Winston purchased the "Star of Sierra Leone" in 1972. He cut it into 17 diamonds with a total weight of 238.48 ct; 13 of the stones were flawless. Originally, the largest stone was a 143.20-ct emerald cut, which proved to be flawed. Mr. Winston felt he wanted something special, so he ordered it recut; the result was a flawless 32.52-ct emerald cut.

Six of the other flawless stones were used in the Star of Sierra Leone brooch. Arranged like the petals of a flower, there are five marquise diamonds of 4.29 ct, 3.92 ct, 3.73 ct, 2.97 ct, and 2.86 ct, and a pear shape of 3.25 ct. The brooch was sold in Europe in 1975.

Ultimately, the largest stone recovered from the rough was a flawless pear shape of 53.96 ct. It sold in 1975 as the pendant to a V-shaped necklace that also contained 98 brilliants weighing a total of 40.83 ct.

THE VARGAS

With a rough weight of 726.60 ct, the Vargas qualifies as one of the largest diamonds ever found. It was discovered in 1938 in the San Antonio River, municipality of Coromandel, Minas Gerais, Brazil, by a native prospector and his partner, a farmer. It was named in honor of the then-president of Brazil, Getulio Vargas. The partners sold the stone to a broker for about \$56,000, after which it changed hands several times. Harry Winston purchased the stone in 1939 for approximately \$600,000. In 1941, he had it cut into 29 stones; all of the important ones were emerald cuts.

The largest stone cut, which weighed 48.26 ct, is now known as the Vargas diamond. It was sold to Mrs. Robert Windfohr of Ft. Worth, Texas, in 1944. The diamond was repurchased by Harry Winston in 1958, and recut to a flawless 44.17 ct. It was sold again in 1961.

Seven of the other emerald-cut diamonds—30.90 ct, 29.95 ct, 25.33 ct, 24.35 ct, 24.30 ct, 23.10 ct, and 17.91 ct—were used in a fantastic diamond bracelet made in 1947 for an Indian maharaja. Two additional emerald-cut diamonds, weighing 22.91 ct (sold in 1946) and 19.43 ct (sold in 1944), were set as rings. In 1968, the 19.43-ct diamond was repurchased by Mr. Winston and recut to a flawless 19.24 ct. It was sold in 1970, repurchased in 1974, and sold again in 1976 to an American client.

THE WEEKEND

In 1965, Harry Winston fashioned a D-flawless marquise diamond of 20.63 ct. At first the stone was not looked upon with any special regard, as Mr. Winston was responsible for cutting over 100 diamonds in the 20-ct range. Then late one Friday afternoon, several months after the stone was mounted as a ring, a customer well known to Mr. Winston arrived at our salon. The gentleman was accompanied by a beautiful, statuesque blond who clearly was not his wife. Without much fanfare, he selected the above-mentioned stone.

Knowing the man could well afford to pay, Mr. Winston gave him the stone on memo. Mr. Winston always delighted in relating how, the following Monday morning, the customer returned the diamond, saying: "Thank you, I had the most wonderful weekend of my life. I'll make it up to you soon." Hence, the Weekend diamond.

The Weekend diamond was sold shortly thereafter to a well-married American client.

THE WINSTON

A 154.50-ct colorless rough diamond was found in the Jagersfontein Mine, Republic of South Africa, in 1952. In 1953, Harry Winston purchased the rough in London for \$230,800. It was subsequently cut to a flawless 62.05-ct pear shape and sold to a "certain King of Saudi Arabia." It was later returned to Mr. Winston who, in turn, resold it shortly thereafter to a private owner in Canada. At the death of the Canadian owner, the diamond was repurchased by Harry Winston. It was recut at that time due to a slight bruise to a D-flawless 61.80 ct. Mr. Winston matched it with the 58.60-ct Louis XIV diamond and sold the two as a pair of earrings in 1964. In November 1981, they were auctioned in Geneva, Switzerland, with a final price of \$7,300,000.

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