

## “Craftsmanship, not devil’s work”

By Dieter Liechti

As a child he was afraid of skulls, today he exports them around the world. As precious jewelry. Based in Zurich, Jean-Pierre “JP” Di Lenardo makes jewelry for rock stars.

Here is an untroubled part of Zurich. A few meters away from the Bahnhofstrasse women in high heels dance across the cobblestones and pause to look in the small but elegant window displays. The five bells of the Church of St. Augustine ring 12 times. Men in their uniform business suits emerge from banks in the neighborhood to find a place in one of the many restaurants close by. Then he appears out of the shadows of his store entrance onto the street – Jean- Pierre “JP” Di Lenardo. He examines me with a scowl like Western legend Lee van Cleef’s Jack Colby in “High Noon”.

“So, you’re a journalist?” he asks.

“Yes”.

“Do you eat meat?”

“Yes.”

“Then come” he orders – walks around the corner of his store “Börse 4” and into the steakhouse Churrasco. “I love meat.”

He is not as fond of journalists, not at all. “I consider it a luxury to be successful with my watches and jewelry around the world, and still stay out of the limelight”. The 48 year old designer and entrepreneur, who has never given an interview for publication, laughs. One can’t even find much information about him or his company Di Lenardo & Co Zurich over the internet. “Discretion is key” he explains, while adjusting the bracelet with two skulls on his wrist. “I learned that as a banker.” A banker? “Not your stereotype banker” he clarifies. “My background wasn’t banking. At the time I had a rather special role at the Union Bank of Switzerland.” He was responsible for refining and transporting physical precious metals around the globe. Looking back, he reflects without resentment “in those days one was proud to be a bank employee. I learned a lot at UBS and loved my job, but in the mid-nineties I noticed that the banking business had changed significantly. And I had as well. So I decided it was time to leave my job as a member of management at the bank.”

The timing wasn’t random. In 1996 on his 33<sup>rd</sup> birthday Di Lenardo bought the first secondhand store for luxury watches and jewelry in Zurich. He opened his doors to start in the “Chreis Cheib”, a rougher part of town, and additionally in 2000 to the more refined location at Augustinergasse 14. And that is where you can still find him today, the large broad-shouldered man who once sang in the well known “Schlieremer Chind” child’s choir. “I feel at home here” he explains, as he enters the security code to open the door at the second location of Di Lenardo & Co Zurich. “Right in the middle of things, but not really part of it.”

That impression fits well with the man who is often confused with the legendary French rock n’ roll entertainer Johnny Hallyday. “That was when he was younger” he explains, reaching into a display case to extract a bracelet with 14 skulls. “I have no

interest in the occult. This is craftsmanship, not devil's work." Profitable craftsmanship: the bracelet is 320 grams of sterling silver, and is part of his "CULT925" label. And that label is very well established. Since Di Lenardo started selling his collection through his friend, fan, and well known vintner Jayson Woodbridge ("Hundred Acre"), "CULT925" has established itself as the in-label for aficionados. Rock, pop, and film stars – particularly in the US – wear his heavy yet not melancholic creations. But "JP" won't reveal names: "That would be a breach of confidence".

Jewelry with skulls – doesn't seem to be particularly original. "It doesn't have to" Di Lenardo counters. "There are things that can't and shouldn't be created anew. Take skulls – that is nature, and we can't improve on nature." But why should American clients be willing to pay thousands of francs to buy jewelry which they could get much cheaper in the States? "Because our creations are 100% handmade – and made in Switzerland. No skull is the same as the next, every set of teeth is unique. I only sell pieces that I like and that meet my standards". Goldsmiths confirm that if his exacting standards are not fulfilled an entire collection will be flattened with a hammer. Di Lenardo explains: "mediocre art is not art".

And from where does he get inspiration for his work? "From nature of course. I have my best ideas when I go jogging in the forest with Dagobert." He laughs "my dog is my muse.

[www.CULT925.com](http://www.CULT925.com)

**Designer Jean-Pierre Di Lenardo with his four-legged muse Dagobert: "I have my best ideas when I go jogging in the forest with Dagobert."**

*Picture: Dieter Liechti*

**The art work from Zurich has conquered the celebrity world. With his "Triumphator" watch Di Lenardo supports the driver and Porsche Super Sports Cup Champion Raffi Bader.**