



## The Biagio Interview

As soon as he walks into the room you now he has arrived, dressed in a black suit, upright starched pink shirt and a Louis Vuitton case. He welcomes you with a good handshake and open smile, when he sits down you see the jeweller – a diamond pave set bangle sparkling, peeping from under the suit and huge diamond ring.

He is in an ambient mood, it is January and Christmas has come and gone. "It was a good Christmas better than I anticipated, I am always cautious at the outset and so delighted when customers visit, new and loyal it's a real buzz in the shops".

Biagio Patalano, 41 a creative jeweller and diamond specialist. We are in his Bicester store, a stones throw from Bicester Village, where he started in 1989 height of the recession. next door to a well known high street jewellers. We have three retail stores, Bicester, Thame and Biagiothejewellers.com. I started out with a vision to set up a shop for people to visit and have a vast selection of

jewellery designed and styled you would find nowhere else except London and Europe. The European designs were so strong and no-one else was seeing it, I travelled extensively and still do meeting and buying from the best craftsman exhibiting in Las Vegas, Basle Switzerland and Italy.

What I instantly recognise is his passion and real determination to find the best jewellery designs and workmanship from the world for his customers and bring it into Oxfordshire. But why? Can you not buy in the UK or have International people come to see you? We do buy some in the UK but its so hard to get exclusivity and I still buy today as I always have I do not want to be selling what 100 other stores are. We are visited now by International companies we have strong relationships with.

It doesn't go unnoticed his red carpet associations. From celebrity customers to first name terms with global jewellers as Georgio Armani, charity balls with A-Listers. Hatton Gardens finest designers, make his bespoke jewellery. Private members club and private banking invites, although the last one he went to he got all the bankers to take their ties off as he thought it was too formal when they were out in the evening socialising. It's clear he has a reputation far exceeding Oxfordshire. He has family that still live on the Island of Ischia, off Southern Italy and he embodies the Italian culture, "For me family is everything, everything. I love to cook and it's usual for us to have 30 at Christmas celebrating," he says.

"I am an Italian romantic at heart, he says with a smile and chuckle I love to see couples get engaged, all the excitement and anticipation everyone different so personal and they come to us and this is what I am passionate about, giving them the best diamond, uncompromisingly which is why I handpick our diamonds in Antwerp, I know they are the best. The bespoke side of the business has seen strong growth, people want to choose their diamond, their setting and want to know all about their diamond. We make bespoke jewellery from £150-£30,000"

His involvement in people lives really seems to touch them, as he tells me they come back sometimes just to see him or celebrate another happy occasion, he and his team were even invited to the wedding of one customer. He tells me they pulled out all the stops at very short notice to have bespoke wedding rings made just in time!

How competitive is jewellery? "Yes it's always going to be competitive and we have to make sure our service and team together with the jewellery are at the top of their game. We recently introduced the Biagio jewellery business onto the web, people can now buy from us at anytime and new customers can reach the Biagio experience". He seems to cause a stir with his brand, the black glossy bags customers receive their jewels in has been copied more than once, so now he has them made in South America.

Much has been reported on the rise of gold in the commodities market "The price of gold has been quite challenging as it's more expensive now to create the rings and buy jewellery so we source carefully, hold prices where we can and are very mindful of value for money. We look to other metals such as Palladium, part of the platinum family. It looks and feels like platinum and is priced competitively. Silver is very popular with our customer so we will look for more designers in silver."

So he leaves our interview, he's off to Basle Switzerland to buy for Christmas and has a fascinating wedding event planned in the shops in March, so happily bringing jewellery and people together in the Biagio community....

I'm sure he'll be touching lives for another 20 years.

