



Raymond Weil epitomises *savoir-faire*. Aesthetics and creativity is the hallmark of this elite Swiss company—one of the few remaining family-owned, independent Swiss luxury watch companies. In an exclusive tete-a-tete with *Lifestyle Living*, Olivier Bernheim, President and CEO, and son-in-law of Raymond Weil, founder of the luxury Swiss watch company, discloses what makes him tick...

— Simran Mishra

VIEW from the top

LL: Tell us about yourself.

OB: I started my professional career with Unilever in Paris, as Marketing Development Manager, which was a totally different field of business than watches, as we dealt with marketing and selling Margrain-table oil and yoghurt. One afternoon, in 1982, my boss at Unilever offered me a new position, and the same evening, my father-in-law offered me a position in the family business of watch making at Raymond Weil, which I gladly accepted, and moved to Geneva. In 1996, when Raymond Weil retired, I became President and CEO.

I introduced a lot of modernity in the eight-year-old watch company, as can be seen with the launch of the emblematic men's and ladies' Parsifal collection. This helped us assert our credentials because it was an innovative design. I also introduced advertising of the brand, which, at that point of time, was unheard of in our company. I also worked internally with our teams to introduce and integrate the web, *Twitter* and *Facebook* into the company. Also, I engaged the company to diversify internationally, as I developed the Chinese, Indian and all of the East Europe market, which took a lot of manpower, time and energy. I am personally dedicated to the Indian market—the only market I am involved with personally. Our brand was the first to be imported and sold in India, thanks to my father-in-law.

LL: What is your business mantra?

OB: My business mantra is to follow in the footsteps of my father-in-law, for he taught me everything I know and also stressed that building and maintaining human relations is the key to any successful business. In 2006, my two sons joined the company as head of sales and head of marketing and they have become the third generation of our family to carry forward our tradition and brand.



Olivier Bernheim with Latino singer Yasmin Levy

LL: What quality marks the success of the Raymond Weil brand in the luxury watch segment?

OB: The key to continuous success in any company is innovation everyday. Our strategy has always been focussed upon internal research and development, an instance of which is our Prototypes department, which is key to the watch-design process

For unmatched Swiss quality, a good research and development department is required to assure success in the long run. Our R&D embraced the latest technological innovations, and applied creativity and innovations at every touch point...such as the development of the complication for the GMT function of the Don Giovanni Cosi Grande's two time-zones and the patented, interchangeable bracelet system for the ladies' Shine collection.

LL: Why are most of your watch collections dedicated to musical works?

OB: Keeping in mind the family tradition of art, culture and music (my wife is a professional pianist), and as a music lover myself, we felt that our passion for the world of art and culture should find expression in

our watches. In 1983, I named the new watch collection Amadeus, which was dedicated to Mozart, and it was an immediate success. And, that is why, even today, most of our watch collections have musical names, such as Parsifal, one of our signature collections, which, even 20 years after its official launch, has been recreated for the Baselworld 2010.

LL: Which watch do you wear?

OB: I change my watches every two years, but I always wear a Raymond Weil creation. My personal favourite is the new addition in titanium—Nabucco Va, Pensiero from the Nabucco range, which I am wearing today. I have a collection of 52 Raymond Weil watches.

LL: How do you relax?

OB: I relax by spending time with my family, taking my three dogs, who are also like my kids, for a walk in the forest. It also helps me exercise for an hour and a half. I unwind when I am close to nature. I love vacationing with my family in Country Isle, which is in the middle of nowhere. I'm a lucky man as I've travelled the planet; yet my favourite destination is my Country Isle, because there is no noise and there are no people. I also love horseback riding, tennis, skiing, opera; and I love renovating my houses.

LL: Is there anything you would like to change in your life?

OB: What I would ideally love is to be an early bird and fall asleep at 10 o'clock and get up at 6am, but I seldom sleep before midnight and get up at 7am!

LL: Anything about you that most people don't know?

OB: I love black chocolate.

LL: Are you a workaholic?

OB: My wife says I'm a workaholic.