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FRAGRANCE AND PERSONAL CARE

## Valmont North America CEO shares Swiss beauty brand's plans

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*Maison Valmont*

By Sarah Gargano

*This interview is part of a new Luxury Daily interview series called The Perfect Ten*

Cedric Roget, CEO of Valmont North America, talks about the Valmont Group, the Swiss brand's core passion of art, and Storie Veneziane, its newest fragrance pillar.

**Tell us a little bit about your background and when you started at Valmont. Why did you choose Valmont?**

I come from a financial background. Before working for the Valmont Group, I had experience working as a business controller and accountant for small- to big-size companies.

I worked for Phillip Morris for three years and Sector Sport Watches, a family-owned business, and then Gate Gourmet from Swiss Air as a chief accountant.

Through these positions, I had the opportunity to experience both big corporations and family owned companies.

At the beginning of 2000, a headhunter came to me and said Mr. Guillon, whom I didn't know at that time, would like to meet me. He was looking for a CFO for Valmont, so we met at the Geneva airport because at the time I was

working for Gate Gourmet there and we spoke for two hours. He shared with me his passion for beauty and art, what his father had built in the skincare industry and how he transmitted this company to Didier.

I really understood that with Valmont, he had a gem in his hands and the potential of the brand and Didier's passion.

For me, it's all about passion. When you see someone like Didier speaking about beauty of art and beauty of women and what he wanted to achieve, it was very clear to me that this is where I wanted to be. And that was in 2000.

The group was much smaller than it is today. I wasn't expecting to work in a skincare company. As a man, that's not the first objective necessarily in your career but with Didier's passion, I clearly understood where he wanted to go.

And for me, it was important to work for someone I could trust and feel like he knows where he wants to go. And with Didier, it was quite immediate.

With my previous experiences I knew I would feel more comfortable in a small- to midsize company where I would know the boss, be able to actually speak to him and share ideas.

It went very fast. We met in January/February and I started in April. That was 17 years ago. I started as CFO for the Valmont Group in Switzerland. I set up some global subsidiaries starting with a subsidiary in Spain, Taiwan and then in North America that was subcontracted to a distributor at that time.

In 2003, the situation in North America was not clear and not working very well, so we decided to merge the U.S. market and the Canadian market.

After a while, we discovered it was not possible to have a subsidiary like that without a CEO. And I said to Didier, it's been four years that I've been working for you as CFO, would you mind giving me the opportunity to be a little more front office and less back office. He said yes immediately.

I have to admit I was surprised. I was only 34 years old at that time. And I had never managed any sales or marketing teams. He only knew me as a CFO.

To hear Didier say, "Yes, do it" was a surprise. So, in 2004 I moved to Montreal and started managing the North American subsidiary.



*Cédric Roget is CEO of Valmont North America*

**Valmont is a family company in every sense of the word, run by owners Didier Guillon and his wife, Sophie Guillon and previously owned by Didier's father. How does this family environment shape the brand's values, environment and, ultimately, the experience for your consumer?**

The key word is experience.

For me, I believe that the family aspect of Valmont really shapes the entire experience that gives the brand a lifestyle feel and a sense of family spirit.

I started working for Valmont the same month as Sophie Guillon, Didier's wife in 2000. She was in charge of customer service at the time. We knew she wanted to take marketing over eventually, but she wanted to take all the steps necessary before reaching that level.

For me, it was really great to see her passion for the product as she was coming from Yves Saint Laurent and Oscar de la Renta, and so interesting to see them both interacting, being husband and wife but at the same time being colleagues and working together.

During the first board of directors meeting, I met Didier's father, the original owner of Valmont. The family spirit is everywhere in the company. You can feel it. It gives a very specific atmosphere. The passion for the brand and passion for the legacy and ownership of the brand is everywhere. In my opinion, this makes a huge difference in our world today.

Didier is always speaking about how we can differentiate ourselves today from the big cosmetics companies like Estee Lauder, L'Oreal, et cetera. Clearly, it is thanks to the Valmont experience and to our core passion of art.

Sophie is anchored in the product. She quickly and thoroughly learned all the research and development behind the products.

Didier and Sophie give the brand a duo. I say they are two sides of the same brain. They really work together, complementing each other. Sophie being the picture of the products and Didier representing the art aspects of the brand. And all together, it gives a tremendous experience to the customer.

I also believe that because we are a family business, we don't have to pay as much attention to the next set of dividends or the price of the shares on the stock market.

We have a long-term approach and this has given me valuable time to build the roots of the brand in North America with the spa. It took us a bit of time but at the end it paid off.



*Valmont's Essence of Bees family*

**The Valmont legacy began in Switzerland in the early 1900's. For 2018, the brand is celebrating their Swiss roots. How important is this heritage to the brand today?**

This heritage is very important. Every brand needs to have a nest to anchor its roots. I think Switzerland and the Valmont clinic established in 1905 are ways to anchor this concept.

Switzerland has always been known for its authenticity. There are a lot of pharmaceutical companies in Switzerland. It's a serious business.

If you compare with France, skincare there is more related to fashion. Most of the French skincare brands come from fashion. But in Switzerland, most of them come from medical expertise.

Valmont's clinic was founded by a medical doctor, Dr. Widmer, in 1905. The fact that the Valmont clinic was taking care of people and human beings before having a product line and a skincare line makes all the difference. Because first of all, they knew how to treat people before trying to make business with skincare. This makes a huge difference.

The environment is also very important.

Still today, the ingredients, the glacial spring water and plant extracts all come from Switzerland. It's all related.

The Guillons give the family spirit, and Switzerland gives the credibility and the research behind every formula. Swiss-made is not just on the packaging, but really deeply seeded in our roots.

**There were some iconic celebrities and royal families who frequented the Valmont Clinic. Who were some of them?**

We had a lot of them. We can speak about Coco Chanel, actress Claudia Cardinale, European royalty including the Belgian royal family, Swiss artist Giacometti, Charlie Chaplin, Grace Kelly.

We had a lot of famous people for almost a century. The clinics in Switzerland like Valmont and La Prairie were very well known for taking care of people. This was the first nest for hydrotherapy, diets and wellbeing.

All of this is anchored in the research of Valmont and guides us today.

**What is Valmont best known for?**

Valmont has always been known as a precursor in anti-aging skincare.

We have always been on top of research and development studies and a pioneer for a lot of different things, like the collagen mask, for example.

Valmont has patented ingredients like our triple DNA that is soaked in magnesium, calcium and sodium.

Our formulas are loaded; they have a high percentage of active ingredients that also include specific liposomed RNA and DNA and glacial spring water.

We are known for visible and long-lasting effects.

Also, our fine textures penetrate the skin very fast and our Bulgarian rose smell is very famous.

You can recognize Valmont products right away just by this smell. It makes us very unique. I would say most people love it.

**Didier Guillon, owner of Valmont, is an art aficionado, collector and overall enthusiast. How is his passion for art incorporated into the ethos of the brand?**

Art has always been the DNA of the brand and is the core of every project we develop. It's the umbrella of the group.

Didier Guillon is a great businessman, but he is first and foremost, an artist. Art is part of his life and part of the Group.

We can see that he always has a picture in mind of where he wants to go. We've never had a fashion model or actress as a visual. It's always been a tribute to an artist or to art.

La Fondation Valmont was started about two or three years ago, but has been in Didier's mind under development for 10 years. This is the link between the Valmont business and Didier's passion for art that connects the pillars.

La Fondation Valmont includes more than 200 art pieces by 30 artists collected over Didier's lifetime. The collection embodies his artistic passion for art. He doesn't buy art for investment but always because of passion. It's because he falls in love with an artist and sometimes he wants to help the artist. And then it leads into some type of exhibition.

Now, we are having more and more art exhibitions. We have been in the last three Venice Biennale: 2013, 2015 and 2017. We have also had art exhibitions in Hydra, Greece and this month we are having an art exhibition in a castle in Nyon, Switzerland.

These pieces of art that belong to Fondation Valmont travel to La Maison Valmont boutiques globally.

We developed this concept for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the brand years ago in 2015. He has traveling art exhibitions all around the world. And Didier will be hosting Pop-Up in New York in September later this year with gorillas.

Every year he makes a limited edition art piece for l'Elixir des Glaciers and a limited edition perfume bottle from Murano to differentiate Valmont.

**Didier has collaborated with other luxury brands such as Lalique for limited-edition pieces. What brands or artists would be some of your ideal collaborators for Valmont?**

The Lalique cabochon piece was a tremendous idea and success in terms of image. I truly believe that these two fantastic brands share the same values and for me it made total sense. It's a way again to differentiate ourselves as brands and be stronger together.

This is what we are trying to do with our five-star properties, to create synergies between luxury brands.

We did the same thing with Time Master and a Swiss watchmaker, Rodolphe. Which makes perfect sense if you understand the name Time Master and that it is Valmont's most expensive product.

To be associated with another craftsmanship brand, make that connection, and create synergies between the Swiss world of watches and skincare was fantastic for us. It's a way to connect with our consumers.

I cannot say I have an ideal brand or artist for a future collaboration with Valmont, but as long as the brand conveys Valmont's same value for luxury, I think the sky is the limit.

Mr. Cimonlin, for example, who is designing the glass mask for the bottles of Valmont's new haute couture fragrance launch, *Storie Veneziane*, is a craftsman that believes in what he is doing and who is true to his passion.

For me, to associate Valmont with other brands that are luxurious, that have the same values in terms of art and limited editions, makes total sense.



*Valmont's Lysander*

**Tell us about *Storie Veneziane*.**

Storie Veneziane is a brand new fragrance collection that will be introduced in April. Its name represents bottles adorned with colorful translucent glass masks. It is a tribute to Murano glass from the 13<sup>th</sup> century with craftsmen practicing their art form.

There are five fragrances in the collection that pay tribute to five different neighborhoods in Venice. Each one will appeal to someone and we hope the collection will please all customers. They are uni -gender.

Didier didn't choose the obvious parts of Venice. He knows the city very well. He chose the hidden secrets of the city. The fragrances contain the purest extracts of the perfume. Storie Veneziane is considered the haute couture fragrance of The Valmont Group.

**Can you tell us about the special Murano glass bottles for Storie Veneziane?**

They are made by hand by Mr. Cimolin, with select glass blowers and craftsmen from Murano. Didier designed the mask. He really wanted something special. He drew the mask and after many attempts, they achieved the desired shape and color of each one. They had a lot of adjustment before finding the perfect formula.

We are very excited to launch this collection in April and think this will be very interesting to the press, too, as they will see the fragrance as very different – as a piece of art and not just a perfume.

Every bottle is unique, every bottle is a little different, each made by hand. So it's a really amazing collection.

Didier has a strong affection for Murano and, in addition to manufacturing the bottles there, he is also involved with helping the Murano glassworkers save their lost art.

**Venice offers a strong identity for the Valmont Group as it holds inspiration for two of your brands, Il Profvmo and the newest fragrance pillar, Storie Veneziane. Can you tell us what is it about Venice that is so fascinating to Valmont?**

I think Venice is especially fascinating for Sophie and Didier because this was their first trip together as a couple. It's a mysterious city. It's an amazing city that is vibrant.

There are a lot of historical buildings, but very mysterious when you go from the airport to the city in your boat. There are a lot of smells, a lot of colors. It's absolutely unique.

Didier and Sophie have a passion for this city. I don't have any comparison to give –even if I love Florence, Roma – Venice is another world, it's very special. I understand this passion. And to connect Venice to fragrance through Il Profvmo and Storie Veneziane makes perfect sense to the Valmont brand.

Venice has always been a hub for bringing scents from the Eastern countries. It has always been a place where leather scents and perfumes were coming from. And, of course, with the Venice Biennale, Didier can find his passion for art that speaks to him through his art exhibitions. It is a natural match.

**Valmont has evolved into a lifestyle brand, encompassing more than just skincare products. There are four pillars that include l'Elixir des Glaciers, Valmont, Il Profvmo and Storie Veneziane. Can you tell us about the full spectrum of the brand today?**

I think it's from the eclectic thinking and vision of Mr. Guillon. He has a 360-degree view of the beauty environment.

We have evolved from a clinic to a skincare brand to a lifestyle group, now representing also perfume brands inspired by Venice. And I think for him to pay a tribute to beauty was more than just skincare. His passion for art, again, is the umbrella that covers the entire group and is part of the DNA of every project he is developing across all four pillars: Valmont skincare, l'Elixir des Glaciers skincare, Il Profvmo and Le Storie Veneziane.

Everything is always related to art and comes back to art.

**Valmont has dedicated spas in some of the most luxurious, five-star hotels all over the world. How important is this spa component to the brand?**

It's extremely important. It's the experience. If you want to have the Wow effect, it's very important to take time to have a Valmont facial.

The facial is like going to the dentist. You have to go to the dentist once in a while and maintain the results at home with your toothbrush and your toothpaste.

If you want to know what Valmont is, you have to try the facial, for sure. And what better atmosphere to try a facial than in a five-star property to experience your treatment? It's all about the experience, the level of service.

For me, what will make the difference in the future is really the experience you are able to offer to your customers.

Everyone is able to buy products online and 99.9 percent of the brands are available online today, but the experience isn't. What you want to do is pamper yourself.

We are in a world where we are always busy, answering emails, phone calls and we need to take time to relax. What could be better than having two hours at The Plaza Athenee to relax, drink a good tea, shut down your computer and cell phone, just take some time for yourself? That's probably the most precious thing in the world right now, to take a little bit of time for yourself, the ultimate luxury.

And five-star luxury properties for me are a natural partner for Valmont because everything is elevated to an art form further underscored by Valmont's core art passion.



*Spa Valmont at New York's Hotel Plaza Athenee*

**Valmont treatments also stand out in the spas out because of the brand's signature butterfly technique. Can you tell us about this?**

The butterfly movement is our signature technique with Valmont. There are two aspects.

The first one is that your aesthetician is next to you instead of being behind you. When you lie on the spa bed and have someone behind you, it is not very relaxing. To have someone on your side, makes a big difference, if you have questions you can ask your aesthetician.

The second aspect of the butterfly movement is that it is a very relaxing movement and gives the aesthetician the ability to apply the products in a very smooth manner to the face, neck and décolleté. It really gives an added value to the treatment for the well-being effect.

Since day one, this butterfly movement has always been our signature technique that sets Valmont apart. When we train aestheticians, they sometimes have difficulty in adjusting themselves to this new style. This technique requires them to play with their entire arms.

It's very physical for an aesthetician to give a Valmont facial. It takes a lot of energy. While performing anti-aging treatments, you try to move the skin upwards and never downwards.

With the butterfly technique, the touch is key and there is always contact with the skin of the customers.

We are also very well known for the massage that we use, for example, with our most iconic product, the prime renewing pack. Massaging, relaxing, anti-aging, wellbeing, it's all part of the full Valmont experience.



*Valmont: Perfecting Powder Cream*

**La Maison Valmont is a relatively new concept for the brand that offers a modern, luxurious, retail space uniting the expertise of the Valmont pillars with the artistic vision of Didier. Can you tell us more about this?**

La Maison Valmont is the missing link between our distribution in spas and our distribution in retail and department stores.

At the beginning, Valmont was known for the spa business and in the past five-six years globally, and over the past three years in North America, we have gone into more retail and department stores such as Le Bon Marche in Paris, Lane Crawford in Hong Kong, now Saks Fifth Avenue in U.S.A. and Holt Renfrew in Canada.

For me, La Maison Valmont is building the bridge between the retail experience and the spa experience. It's a way to represent the four pillars of the Valmont Group all together inside the same nest with Didier's overlying passion for art. And it's really giving you the know-how of the Valmont Group into a single space where you can have treatments and where you can discover our perfumes.

Customers can have a make-up experience and dedicated Valmont aestheticians can provide them with full Valmont experience.

We also have some limited edition pieces available for sale exclusively at La Maison Valmont. The goal is to offer an experience you cannot have anywhere else.

As we know, department stores are all about selling, and spas are about the experience for customers and it's very important to combine these.

For a small- to midsize family-owned business, it's very important to show this know-how and what is behind the Valmont Group. I think [the] La Maison Valmont boutique concept is the exact, perfect way to display this know-how.

La Maison Valmont is also affecting how department stores are presenting the brand.

By putting art in the department stores, we have incorporated an element called the Golden Cage that you can see displayed consistently in department stores globally.

Holt Renfrew in Canada and Saks in New York will each have a piece of the mask from *Storie Veneziane*.

La Maison Valmont pushes department stores to follow us in that direction which is to offer more of an experience to the customer.



We open your mind to something different, 'What is a Murano glass?' It opens your mind to new artists and that is what Didier wants.

### **Are there plans for a Maison Valmont in North America?**

We don't want to open too many La Maison Valmont boutiques. It must stay a limited-edition concept.

Our goal is to open two-three La Maison Valmont boutiques in the next four to five years. We are actively looking for the next location.

Our goal is to open next La Maison Valmont in the United States by mid-2019. We are open to options on either the East or West Coast.

To date, we have six La Maison Valmont that have been opened in the past 24 months: Berlin, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Vancouver, Bon Marche and Lausanne.

### **How many countries does Valmont have distribution in and who are your key retailers in North America?**

We are present in 50 countries worldwide today. Most of them are taken care of by our subsidiaries. That is one of the main differences with our competitors who deal with distributors.

Valmont's key markets of Europe, Asia and North America are managed by subsidiaries and, in my opinion, this makes us different from other family-owned skincare brands that work with distributors.

For our distribution channel in North America, we have five-star properties such as the Hotel Bel-Air, Hotel Plaza Athenee in New York, Langdon Hall in Ontario and Hazleton Hotel in Toronto.

We have around 35 hotels in North America that carry Valmont. We also have day spas and medical spas.

For department stores, we work exclusively with Saks in U.S.A. and Holt Renfrew in Canada.

All together, Valmont is in around 200 doors in North America.

### **What is your favorite product from Valmont?**

The prime renewing pack is my favorite product. The Happy Mask, as the Chinese call it, it's a glow, it's instant. That's the one I always have in my bathroom or in my suitcase.

I also like Serumulsion that is convenient for men who can be a little lazy with skincare. Having a serum and a cream in the same product is very convenient when you travel, so I love that.

In terms of perfume, I like Lysander [Il Profvmo's newest introduction]. For me, it's the perfume I can wear everyday.

I also think I will like the next introduction from Il Profvmo, Romeo. I've only tried it once but I think it's going to become my next favorite.

For the upcoming Storie Veneziane fragrance collection, I think the Gaggia Medio will be my favorite one. It's more woody and has an amber smell.

### **What is your vision for Valmont in five years?**

Valmont has a fantastic momentum right now. But I also think that in North America specifically, we haven't even scratched the surface.

I really believe that the next five years will be absolutely amazing for the brand as long as we are able to differentiate ourselves from all the other brands.

I think we still have to be modest when you compare yourself to the big brands. But we have a big advantage in being small in a way.

If we are able to keep control of our customer service and the level of the experience that we provide to our partners and to the end consumers, I really think the Valmont Group with four pillars has huge potential.

In North America, we took time to build the roots, to secure the best aestheticians in each city that recommend and use Valmont products.

It took us close to 10 years to build and, now, thanks to more brand awareness, thanks to more press, more targeted bloggers and influencers that can transmit this message, the fact that we are in department stores as well we are enjoying more brand awareness than ever.

We just had a meeting with Saks team in New York and they were telling us that 4.5 million people pass through their store per year and in a spa, it's maybe 10-20 people per day. So clearly for the brand, this new exposure is huge.

We need to keep this experience, we need to keep this niche approach, we want to stay luxury. We don't want to be a brand you can find at every corner.

For me, there is no possible success in the mass market.

By partnering with art exhibitions, galleries and offering something different to the customers, we will succeed.

Now, from a North America point of view, the biggest challenge is human resources and having the right people at the right places making sure that we can embody the organization to evolve in the right direction. Making sure that we have enough knowledgeable people to take care of our customers. And I think it's going to be great.



*Sarah Gargano*

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