



Q&amp;A

## Lalique makes big play for luxury interior design business

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Lalique crystal adorns a Mikimoto boutique. Image courtesy of Lalique

By **Sarah Gargano**

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

Maz Zouhairi is that rare luxury marketer who has stretched his company's brand across categories without losing its core. In his 12 years helping Lalique as North America president/CEO, he has seen the French maker of exquisite crystal glassworks morph into a full-fledged lifestyle brand encompassing fragrance, furniture, home accessories, household linen, art and fine jewelry.

From its limited-edition works of art to collaborations and constant stream of innovations, Lalique is forging ahead as a luxury brand that retains the spirit of founder René Lalique while contemporizing its offerings to stay relevant in a world that increasingly seeks experiences over accumulation. Mr. Zouhairi leads from the top, driving Lalique especially to be a key player in bespoke interior design.

"Up until now, the interiors side of our business has been a well-kept secret," Mr. Zouhairi said from his New York headquarters. "Very few people are aware of this, except for the very affluent, well-traveled individuals who know about our interiors capabilities."

Best known for crystalware such as the iconic Bacchantes Vase and its collaborations with automakers such as Rolls-Royce and Bentley for their hood ornaments, **Lalique** is now poised to embrace all aspects of the affluent and ultra-high-net-worth consumer's life at home and play.



*Lalique crystal for under the Christmas tree*

In this extensive interview, Mr. Zouhairi spells out Lalique's evolution from maker of decorative crystal to myriad categories, the brand's six pillars based on its continued output of handmade products from France, and the push to grow the interior design business. Please read on:

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

Wow, it seems so long ago. I started at Lalique in 2005, right at a time when the brand was ready for a renaissance.

Prior to Lalique, I was working for Bourjois Paris, which is a division of Chanel, to help launch the line in the U.S. I was there for about five years as vice president of sales.

The Lalique opportunity came up as a coincidence. I was involved with the Luxury Education Foundation (LEF) through their hallmark Master Class that brings together Columbia Business School and Parsons School of Design students.

The class had a few case studies, one of which was Lalique, and I was assisting Ketty Maisonrouge, president of LEF, in teaching that first class. Through working on the Lalique case study, I realized this is a brand that has an incredible heritage and legacy but was somewhat quiet and had, quite frankly, collected some dust.

Before attending the class, I thought that Lalique would be the boring case study and the others would be the really exciting ones because they were brands like Louis Vuitton, Chanel [and] Hermès that had all done a lot to be exciting and they had already been through their renaissance. Lalique had not.

So when I was at that class, I realized there was so much more that could be done with it to bring the brand to where it is today or where it needs to be in the next 15-20 years.



*Maz Zouhairi is president/CEO of Lalique North America*

**There had been a lot of change at Lalique prior to you becoming CEO. You seem to have brought stability and leadership to the brand.**

Yes, before me there were a few presidents that had gone through quick transitions. But each president left their mark and contributed even if they had been there only a short time and allowed the brand to be where it is today.

It took me about two years before I could put my arms around the business.

When I took the brand over, it was the right time to invest in Lalique and study the DNA of founder René Lalique and his history to allow this past to illuminate a path for the future.

I'm very proud that I've been here for 12 years. Some people say it's too long but on the contrary, I take great pride in having built an incredibly stable home, a brand that now I understand every part of its DNA.

This time has allowed me to dedicate myself to learning, understanding and building an incredible team that shares this passion. And we're all moving in one direction. The fact that we've been able to position Lalique in a way that will allow it to flourish and grow is incredibly rewarding.

**Can you tell us how the company has evolved and what it's doing today?**

Today, Lalique has six pillars of the brand. When many people think of Lalique, they think of crystal. In reality, crystal represents only one division of the brand. It's still the biggest part of the brand, representing half of our business, and this decorative objects sector will always be the heartbeat of the brand.

But there are five other pillars of the brand including jewelry, interior design, fragrance, art and hospitality.

The hospitality sector is the most recent division created with the opening of five star property Villa René Lalique, the original home of Lalique's founder, that allows the brand to showcase its lifestyle aspect and all pillars of the brand, bringing everything full circle.

None of these pillars are diversification of the brand. They are a true representation of the heritage and history of what René Lalique had started.

René was not just doing jewelry or glass or perfume bottles. He was about pushing boundaries, creating shocks. He was an incredible artist and designer who undertook many collaborations in his time, whether it was with projects involving cars, trains, buildings or ships.

Through his inspiration, we were able to cement Lalique within those six pillars as truly a French luxury lifestyle brand.

We bring this heritage and we respect it, protect it and present it in a way that is relevant to today's time, that is attractive to people, with a contemporary approach and a modern way to live with the brand.

We've been faithful to the DNA of the brand and this allows us to achieve the success we are seeing today.



*Bentley hood ornament by Lalique*

**We know you are focusing on the interior design pillar of the brand and that you would like to see significant growth here. Can you tell us more about that?**

Up until now, the interiors side of our business has been a well-kept secret.

Very few people are aware of this, except for the very affluent, well-traveled individuals who know about our interiors capabilities.

I have the hope to communicate this story about our interiors to a wider audience.

Not everyone can afford it, but we want everyone to know that we are able to create truly unique presentations.

**What are the parts of your interiors division?**

Within the interiors business, we have three parts.

The first is our wide range of chandeliers, lighting and tables designed by René, Marc and Marie-Claude Lalique, as well as some of the newer collaborations with designers like Lady Tina Green & Pietro Mingarelli for Lalique Maison, Pierre-Yves Rochon, Studio Andrée Putman and Delisle that are sold through our boutiques.

The second part is the interior design studio in Paris with bespoke capabilities where our clients are able to create something really unique like custom panels, murals, furniture and staircases using crystal elements. It's an infinite way for us to create and execute a design.

In the past, we were limited to the size of the ovens in the factory, but today we've pushed the boundaries and found new ways to implement the crystal designs by using tempered glass that allows us to apply crystal elements to absolutely any measurement.

We can do anything from the façade of a building, a crystal floor or wall, so it really opens of the opportunity for us to create something stunning.

The third part of the interiors pillar and an area where I see growth potential is in the luxury residential space.

Here, we can go into these projects and create bespoke capabilities that will allow Lalique to be visible in lifestyle ways. An example is what we did for the Ten Pound Bar in The Montage Hotel in Los Angeles where we created a complete Lalique environment including custom tables, panels for the bar, lighting, decanters and crystal stemware. That's where I see significant growth happening in Lalique Interiors.



*Restaurant Le George © Eddy Briere*

### **What are some of the noteworthy interior design projects Lalique has worked on recently?**

Lalique's interior design studio worked on a new light sculpture for the Mikimoto boutique in Tokyo. Inspired by the clover that is their motif, our team developed an incredible chandelier made up of 355 crystal clovers using new manufacturing techniques.

We also created crystal clover wall sconces that are positioned in front of the light sculpture and spread over the wall like a constellation of stars. It's really magical.

We also worked closely with French interior designer Pierre-Yves Rochon who is a huge fan of René Lalique's architectural work to participate in his new project commissioned by the George V Hotel.

In collaboration with Lalique Interior Design Studio, Pierre-Yves Rochon developed customized interiors for the restaurant including the reception desk, working stations, a magnificent large rectangular table and four large entry doors.

The results were truly spectacular and showcase the range of Lalique's custom capabilities across lighting, panels and furniture.

Here in the United States, we are currently working on projects with the Waldorf-Astoria Hotels in Los Angeles and New York.

### **For the bespoke design studio and their capabilities, how does it work?**

Interior designers, architects and clients come to us with a vision and together with the interior design studio in Paris, we review the project, consult on its creative potential, create technical drawings, a timeline and ultimately realize that vision.

Although our designs are limitless, our capabilities have limits since each project is executed in our atelier in Paris with a limited number of designers and artisans in the Lalique factory.

As a result, we are very selective about who we work with so that we keep the right presentation of the brand.

In the case of our collaboration with Pierre-Yves Rochon, we had a long-term relationship with him so when the Georges V Restaurant project in Paris came up, he wanted to use crystal elements to achieve certain designs. He worked closely with Lalique's design team and communicated his vision to them.

We, in turn, communicated the brand's heritage and our capabilities and how we can marry the two.

The great thing about collaborations such as these is that it pushes the boundaries on both sides.

For the artist, he is able to communicate his vision. For the Lalique artisans, they need to look at new ways to implement the vision of the artist and that can be challenging.

These challenges are why we are able to push boundaries and create something that is truly unique. Neither artist nor Lalique could have been able to create this on his own had it not been for the truly collaborative effort.

For the Zaha Hadid collaboration, in particular, her vases were an immense challenge for the Lalique artisans to achieve as Zaha was committed to her vision, but they succeeded and overcame technical obstacles to produce sublime architectural crystal pieces.

Also, in terms of color, for Zaha, she wanted to have a specific midnight blue that was tough for us to create. It took the artisans a long time before they were able to perfect that exact midnight color blue. And we were able to achieve that color blue only a few months before her passing and she signed off on it.

Everyone at Lalique is grateful to have had the opportunity collaborate with such a legend in the architecture universe.



*Noir Premier's exclusive collection is extended with a new fragrance highlighting one of René Lalique's masterpieces, the 'Libellule' brooch*

### **How long does it take to achieve a custom design?**

It depends. We have a list of architects and designers that we feel are synergetic with our brand. Once we're able to meet and agree on a specific design, the process goes through many steps from working with the atelier, creating the mold, going to the factory and working with our artisans.

It could take anywhere from two months to five years for a piece to be born. That's what makes Lalique so special, this attention to detail, meticulousness and perfection.

There has been a lot of buzz about the opening of five star hotel, Villa René Lalique, two years ago. How did that come about?

The original home of René Lalique had been acquired by the brand when Silvio Denz bought Lalique. It's a short distance away from the factory and René used to stay there when he would spend time at the factory.

As we studied the brand, its DNA, the direction where we wanted it to go, the home became part of the inspiration. How wonderful would it be to present the brand and all of its pillars in a living environment that our audience could come and be inspired by?

We wanted people to really spend time there, visit the factory and the Lalique Museum that was opened by the French government that is also nearby. We wanted to give everyone a complete Lalique lifestyle experience.

Villa René Lalique has only six suites, so instead of taking a hotel approach, we decided to take a gastronomic approach to the project.

We had an existing relationship with Swiss architect Mario Botta and invited him to build a spectacular restaurant and wine cellar. We asked international interior designers, Lady Tina Green and Pietro Mingarelli, the creators of Lalique Maison, to decorate all of the interiors.

Each of the six rooms represents a specific period of Lalique's history. It's become one of the most notable spaces in the world. We are booked through early 2019.



*Villa René Lalique lobby © Reto Guntli*

**What are your ambitions for Lalique's interior design business?**

I would like Lalique's interior design to remain very special, but would like to open up the secret and give it more exposure. That will be done in a few ways.

We will continue to collaborate with our existing relationships and collaborators like Pierre-Yves Rochon to incorporate Lalique into some of the most luxurious spaces in the world.

We will keep it unique and not overexpose it.

We have also created a special markets department in Lalique being led by a design industry professional who is networking with the major names in the interior design world to communicate our interior design capabilities to showcase the brand in exciting ways.

**Why do you think interiors is growing into such important category?**

We live with this product. We want our homes to represent our lifestyle. Depending upon how well traveled you are and how you want your living space to feel, that's something that will always be relevant.

Whether or not you shop online or at boutiques, you are always going to want your living space to feel great for you. And Lalique is a brand that gives you this beautiful product that luminates the space, gives you hope and makes your home look great.

The bespoke capabilities will allow each client to interpret their individual style in their home, whether its modern, Art Deco, Art Nouveau, we're able to communicate our heritage in many different ways.



### ***Patrón and Lalique: Serie 2***

#### **What is your favorite piece of Lalique?**

The Bacchantes Vase is the most spectacular piece.

Before I started at Lalique, I knew the vase from my mother. But I love this piece for different reasons than my family.

When it was designed in 1927, it showed 10 identical women in a trance-like dance, worshipping the God Bacchus. This created shock and it shows you what a progressive thinker René Lalique was back then.

In 2017, we are celebrating the 90th anniversary of the Bacchantes Vase and collaborated with American artist Terry Rogers to reinterpret this iconic piece.

In Terry's version, when you look closely, you notice that each of his women on the vase is independent, different, individual. This is a powerful message about the evolution of women: where we were and where we are today.

I hope in another 90 years, when Lalique reinterprets the Bacchantes Vase for that anniversary, it will continue to be relevant and continue to focus on the power of women.

Maybe by then, women will be leading the world and the world will be a better place. So, to me, the piece means more than just the design. It sends a powerful message.

#### **Who are some of your ideal collaborators for Lalique?**

I have great respect for Elie Saab and Peter Marino.

#### **Would those potential collaborations be for a jewelry collection and interior design collection respectively?**

No, I would do something with Peter Mario on the art side and with Elie Saab, something with decorative objects.

I would purposely not choose a field they are comfortable with. It's about pushing boundaries, having some discomfort, disruption, that allows us to create something innovative, not traditional.





*The production process of Lalique's Mon Premier Cristal*

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