

RAISING THE STANDARD

Cartier's latest gold sourcing initiative is flying the flag for social and environmental integrity ensuring that both habitat and community thrive on every level

Cartier's recent initiative to begin sourcing ethical gold from a new mining operation in Central America is setting high standards for luxury brands in the realm of corporate social responsibility. Managed and developed by the Italian-based Goldlake Group, the Eurocantera mine in central Honduras is chemical-free, has a zero waste policy, provides free healthcare and has partnerships with artisanal miners in the local community. Director of Corporate Responsibility, Pamela Caillens, explains the importance of such an alliance, not only for the French jewellery maison, but for the luxury industry as a whole.

What does Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) mean to you and to Cartier?

First of all it means everything to us. What CSR covers is ethics, human rights, social issues and environmental issues within our own operations, and within our industry at large. We have chosen specifically to focus on the precious supply chain – precious metals and minerals (such as gold, diamonds and gemstones) – because we believe that as a world-renowned jeweller we have a role to play that stems at least symbolically beyond our own interests.

How did Cartier become involved with PACT (a non-profit US-based organisation supporting the project) and what was your brand's impetus to begin working with PACT's partner, Goldlake Group?

Our awareness of issues in the jewellery supply chain led us to play a role in the founding of the Responsible Jewellery Council which is about driving broad based change. What we were seeking to do was spotlight and support pioneering and forward thinking companies and also inspire others and create a form of emulation. This is how we came across Goldlake, an Italian company that operates a mine in Honduras that has extraordinary standards

in terms of environmental practice. Working with PACT was a wonderful way to engage and be stimulated in terms of our thinking and strategy as we go forward.

Can you tell me about Eurocantera's "zero waste, zero pollution" operation and tree planting programme?

The way [Eurocantera] extracts uses absolutely no chemicals; they use only water – which is recycled. No mercury, no cyanide. Beyond that, what they are seeking to do is recreate the local environment and rehabilitate as they go. In terms of waste management they have low impact through the use of closed circuit water, and there is no erosion of the landscape. In terms of the actual waste which is left when you take the gold out of the ground, [which comes from cement], they use this and sell it as gravel and clay. The logic is clean extraction, minimal impact on the environment and an objective of zero waste.

Cartier and Tiffany were among the founders of the Responsible Jewellery Council (RJC) in 2005. Do you believe social responsibility is quickly catching on with other big luxury brands?

Oh definitely! I would say that a luxury maison has values of excellence ingrained in their brand's DNA and this is an element on which you can build to incorporate CSR. Ever since 2005 Cartier has been quite active in seeking out our competitors directly to join the Responsible Jewellery Council because we believe we'll all improve and win together or we'll all lose together as an industry. Strength is in numbers and we will have more impact on the supply chain if there are more of us around the table. RJC has grown to 150 members and we were instrumental in the joining of many of [these] European luxury brands. If you look at the brand names today you see

"Philanthropy is about how you choose to spend the money that you've earned, CSR is about how you choose to earn it."



Chanel, Gucci, Bulgari. Even though not all problems will be solved by industry alone – some of them need the involvement of government – industry needs to play a role. And we've found that this message has been very well received by the companies that we've engaged with.

There seems to be some confusion in the media about how corporate social responsibility relates to the luxury market. What would you say to those critics who balk at the notion of luxury brands being ethically and socially responsible?

Once I read something many years ago, the head of Hermes was asked this question answered "luxury is what you can repair" and that's a very attractive definition. I definitely don't see a contradiction between luxury and social responsibility. I often get asked this question and it always surprises me because Cartier makes a few products of high quality which are meant to be durable and kept throughout your life. For instance, if one day you want to sell a Cartier product you will get better value for it if you have it with its red box. It's part of the product. So there is something deep down in luxury that is very compatible with the spirit of sustainability. It's about those few things that you value and that you keep. I think that is no excuse to say "now our job is done." You still need to play a role, you still need to improve your operations. It's not a proposition of wastefulness or, at least, it shouldn't be.

Over the years Cartier has established several initiatives aimed at social responsibility, namely the Fondation Cartier for Contemporary Art and the Cartier Women's Initiative Awards. Is PACT your most ambitious or perhaps most challenging project to date?

We have commitments in many directions and in terms of CSR our key commitment is to the precious jewellery supply chain. Outside the CSR the Contemporary Art Foundation is something we are very proud to have founded 25 years ago and the Cartier Women's Initiative Awards is an important message for us. But I wouldn't compare them. These initiatives are distinct for us from CSR: philanthropy is about how you choose to spend the money that you've earned, and CSR is more about how you choose to earn it.

How much of Cartier's gold comes from the Eurocantera mine in Honduras? And given what you've said about not using CSR

as a marketing tool, will customers be made aware which of Cartier's products have been ethically sourced?

We are not going to market a specific Goldlake line or product because this really is about continuous improvement in our corporate policies. We really want to be clear that this is not a marketing proposition. What we've done in terms of gold sourcing is that we now require all our suppliers be members of the Responsible Jewellery Council and uphold those standards. Buying from Goldlake is a compliment, a way to highlight what we see as a form of best practice. It's not about aid and development. It's about a business proposition for good that is profitable for the company and for the community. We thought this was an interesting approach that we hadn't yet seen in gold mining. When it comes to the actual quantities that we're buying from Goldlake we're currently purchasing all of their production, which is still a small part of our supply. But the point is that if we wanted to buy all of our supply in that form it [the infrastructure] doesn't exist. And the best way to make it happen is to support it, make it public and create the desire in others to go out and realise that yes there is a market for this kind of business at a premium.

What long term effects do you hope to see come to fruition with the Goldlake partnership?

First of all, by purchasing from them we are enabling them to continue to invest and to develop and possibly replicate the model in territories that would be geologically appropriate. The second thing is that we believe this will bring Goldlake some attention because our name is well known and can enable them to find new clients. Then there are more indirect objectives: we hope that other people will want to copy [Goldlake] or do things that are just as good but different and add to the number of interesting initiatives that are starting to appear like the great work that is being done by the Alliance for Responsible Mining. They are working more with private projects in South America, and the emergence of a possible fair trade gold label. We believe that there can't be too many different efforts to approach in improving gold mining. We want to show that things are possible and economically viable and are possibly scalable. Because you don't want things to stay tiny for ever. It's ok if they start tiny but the aim is for them to grow.

Lauren Weinberg

