

Interview with Neil Duttson

Cast your mind back to the year 2000. Guy Ritchie writes and directs the film, Snatch, a cat and mouse thriller at the centre of which is an 84-carat diamond. In the opening scene Jason Statham's lead character utters these words:

"What do I know about Diamonds? I'm a boxing promoter. I was a happy boxing promoter until a week ago. And then... What do I know about Diamonds...? Don't they come from Antwerp...?"

Around the same time Neil Duttson fancied a career change. He was an event organiser. But rapidly becoming an unhappy event organiser. He decided he wanted to move into, 'Bling.' "But what did I know about Diamonds...? Don't they come from Antwerp...?" mused Neil before embarking on a diploma course there.

"I studied diamonds in Antwerp, I basically went back to school aged 32, and came out with a diploma in, 'the rock.' A great friend of mine got engaged and was desperate for a stone, so off I went to Antwerp, knocked on a few doors, eventually found a dealer who was willing to deal with me," explains Neil and that's when his company Duttson Rocks was born, a year later in 2001.

"I've always had a fascination with diamonds. For me, they're very sexy, chic, everyone loves diamonds. And I've got to be brutally honest; I thought I'd meet more girls. Of course I do – But they're all engaged," jokes a man whose smart snappy attire and charm has the air of 007 about him.

Seven years on he has clients all over the world and sources stones for Hollywood movie stars, premier league footballers and mates of his who are about to go down on bended knee. He's earned himself the nickname, 'King of Bling,' or 'the Rock Doctor.' But like anyone whose job is not quite 9 to 5, his banking needs are very specific.

"Arbuthnot Latham have been brilliant in helping me move my business along. They've been a phenomenal part of my business. Chris Arbuthnot makes the effort, his team are amazing and I call it easy banking. You pick up the phone and there's someone there. None of this, 'press 1' and then ten minutes later you're still pressing numbers."

Neil Duttson used to bank with Halifax until one day he was trying to send a diamond over to Japan to a British banker. "I couldn't get someone on the phone to understand the transfer of dollars from Japan to England and it became an absolute nightmare. I spent hundreds on a mobile phone all weekend trying to sort it."

Five years ago he swapped Howard and the Halifax, for Chris and Arbuthnot Latham, and has never looked back.

"I'm sure Howard was a very nice person...But Chris is fantastic. If I need to borrow from Peter to pay Paul, they look after me. It just comes down to that personal touch. A high street bank really doesn't get it."

His business continues to grow and thrive, despite the credit crunch. "People still need to get engaged," observes Neil. "Instead of spending ten thousand

pounds on a ring, they might spend five thousand. But the beauty of this industry I'm in...is the stone can always be upgraded at a later date...!"

The only problem now facing the International Diamond Expert is where to position himself at dinner parties. "Everyone's very excited about what I do. It creates chat. But I make friends of the girls, and enemies of the husbands, because they know they're going to have to fork out for something in the future," he laughs.

Just goes to show, they really are still a girl's best friend.