

Stouffville Jeweller Stops Just Short of Arctic in Pursuit of Diamonds

By Shaun Michael Samaroo

Diamonds are a gemologist's best friend. Just ask David Barthau, whose interest in diamonds has taken him to within 210 kilometres of the Arctic Circle.

The owner/operator of Barthau Jewellers on Main Street Stouffville embodies four decades of family expertise in the jewellery trade. "My father started his jewellery business 42 years ago, and I started ours moving to Main Street from Markham 32 years ago," said David. His wife Janet has worked side by side with him to build the business.

The Barthaus recently travelled to the Diavik Diamond Mine in the Northwest Territories, leaving the store in the capable hands of their gemologist son Darren, who represents the third generation to be involved in the family business.

The couple flew 300 km from Yellowknife to the mining site, where a sophisticated open pit mine operation employs over 300 full-time staff, 65 percent northern, including over 250 Aboriginal employees. Owned by Rio Tinto and Harry Winston, it is one of the largest diamond mines in Canada, said David, a master graduate gemologist who has become an expert on Canadian diamonds.

"Canada is now, astonishingly, the third largest supplier of diamonds in the world. Next year we will be the second largest,

behind Russia," he said. "The quality of our diamonds is very high. Now, there's a fourth mine in Canada, called Victor, just west of James Bay in Ontario. We now have the highest yielding diamond mine in the world. And Canada only started mining diamonds 12 years ago."

Apart from a detailed tour of the mine, he got a first hand look at diamond cutting operations and other aspects of the industry, including "a trip to Antwerp, Belgium, to see how the rough diamond is sorted and sold." A piece of diamond is sent to Antwerp for assessment and returned to Yellowknife for cutting and polishing. During his trip, David also rubbed shoulders with leaders of the diamond mining industry. "The landscape is breathtaking, and the mining operation is so amazing to experience."

Canada has a bright future in the global diamond mining industry, he said. "I experienced the mining of diamonds. To experience something (gives you) a whole different appreciation than just to hear about it. This country has produced 50 million carats of diamonds since 2003. That's something I am quite excited about."

He plans to establish his family name for generations to come as jewellery experts in the community. In the process, he is developing into one of Canada's expert gemologists, specializing in diamonds, his love and passion.

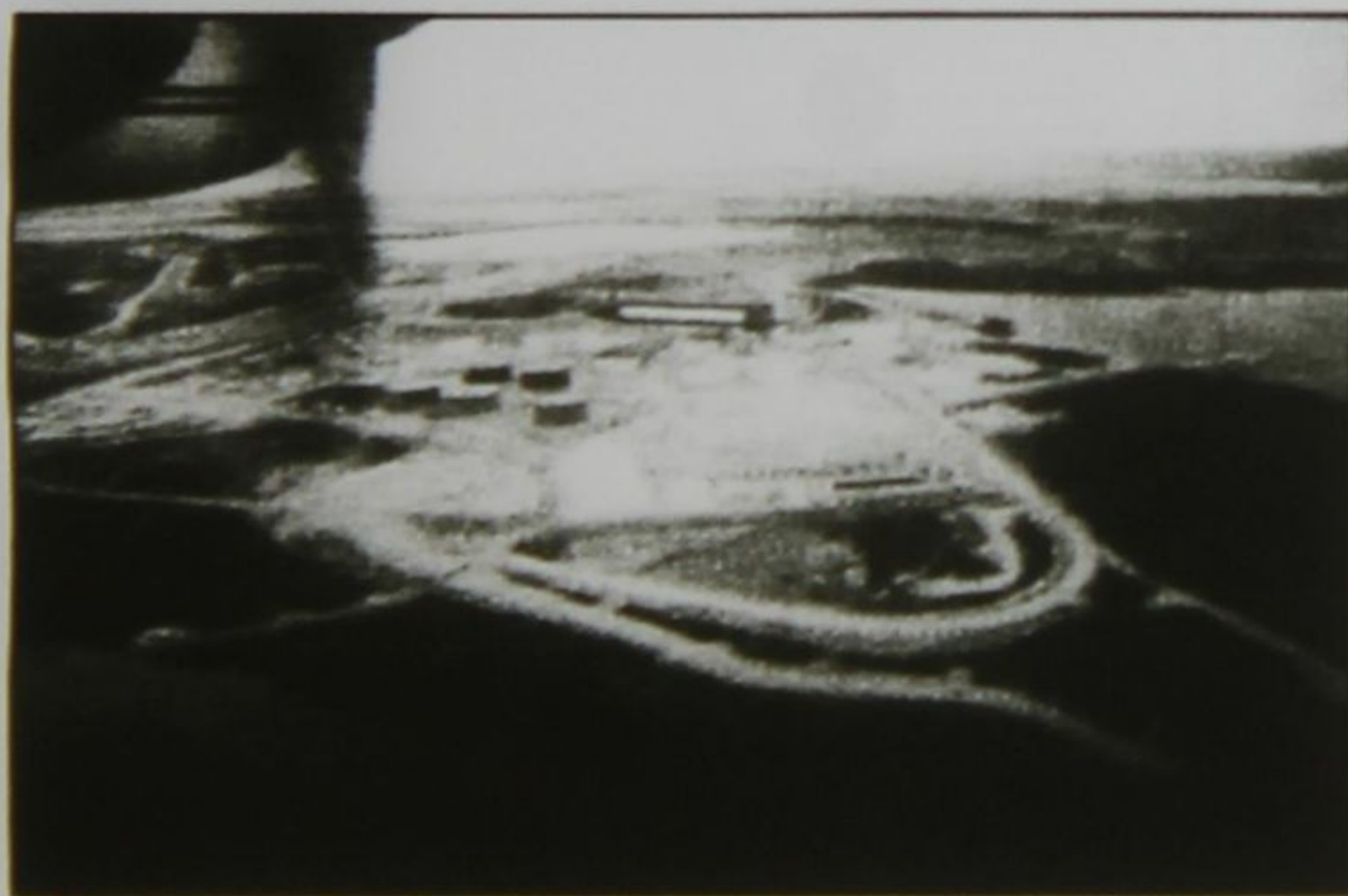
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Two hundred and ten carats of rough diamonds from Victor Mine just west of James Bay, Nunavut.



David and Janet Barthau stand at the head of the open pit.



An aerial shot of Diavik Mine in the Northwest Territories.



A view of old Yellowknife in the fall.

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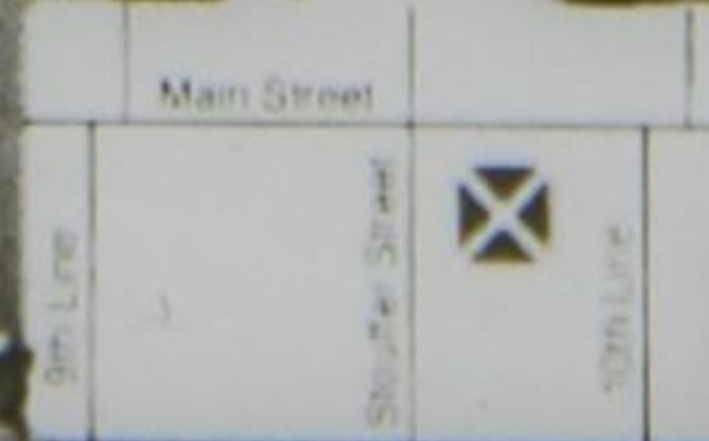
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