

am New York

MADAME PAULETTE: WITH CUSTOMERS LIKE DONALD TRUMP, CITY DRY CLEANER LOOKS TO GO GLOBAL



John Mahdessian, owner of Madame Paulette dry cleaners, poses for a portrait inside his corporate headquarters in Long Island City.

John Mahdessian considers himself the "chief surgeon" of dry cleaning. People come to his store to get out the toughest of stains, and he's been known to perform emergency cleanings at parties. If there's a spill, then luckily there is a dry cleaner in the house. Mahdessian is the third-generation in his family to run Madame Paulette dry cleaning shop, founded on the Upper East Side by his great uncle in the 1950s.

Today, Madam Paulette is a business that is set to go global with a clientele list full of celebrities, according to Mahdessian. "For once I bring a nice celebrity status to the table. I bring the level of a true expert if not a chief surgeon in this industry," Mahdessian said.

Fashion designers use his services, as do celebrities, including Donald Trump and Meryl Streep, he said. He tells stories of cocktail parties at Park Avenue apartments and weddings at the Plaza Hotel.

He didn't always want to enter the family business. After college he worked for a month at Madame Paulette, but intended to move on to a Wall Street job. His career aspirations shifted, however. "I realized that I felt obligated to be there for my father," whose health had deteriorated, Mahdessian said. "He wasn't going to make it much longer in this industry."

He took over the business in 1987 and transformed the store. Business picked up, growing 20 to 25 percent a year, he said. When Mahdessian first took over about 10 employees worked for him, but today he employs about 90 pressers, stain-removers and dry cleaning experts.

Madame Paulette's flagship outlet, located between 65th and 66th on Second Avenue, is being renovated. The store will display designer clothes in its windows, mimicking boutiques on Rodeo Drive or Madison Avenue, and it will expand to take over half of the Upper East Side block, Mahdessian said. The renovation is slated for completion by Nov. 1.

He also plans to take Madame Paulette global, starting with Dubai and Los Angeles, and eventually opening stores from Milan to Tokyo to Paris. Wherever the demographics are fashion conscious, or wealthy, there's demand for Madame Paulette, Mahdessian said. "There's a need for my services to be all over the world to maintain the integrity of them and to serve clients that have these possessions," he said.