

Event Recap from TimeCrafters 2016, Luxury Watch Show

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TimeCrafters 2016, America's luxury watch show took place at Park Avenue Armory in New York City from 12-15 May 2016. This fourth annual event featured the best of 2016 collections, a watchmaking workshop, tours

and panel sessions. As part of the exhibition, Vacheron Constantin unveiled the Reference 57260 pocket watch, the world's most complex watch with 57 distinct complications. It took a team of three watchmakers eight years to design and construct the watch. Also, Hublot brought the Ferrari F1 racing simulator with a full immersion driving experience to attendees as a watchmaking partner to Ferrari and to complement its watch exhibition.

Participating brands included A. Lange & Söhne, Alpina, Ateliers Demonaco, Audemars Piguet, Baume & Mercier, Chopard, Frederique Constant, Hublot, HYT, Jaeger-LeCoultre, Manufacture Contemporaine Du Temps, Richard Mille, Roger Dubuis, TAG Heuer, Tiffany & Co., Urwerk, Vacheron Constantin, and Zenith.

Here are some highlights of the event.

Smartwatches

TAG Heuer presented the TAG Heuer Connected smartwatch at the show, which was launched in November 2015. The TAG Heuer Connected is the first Android Wear smartwatch introduced by a luxury brand. The brand partnered with Google to customise the Android Wear operating system, and with Intel to have an Intel processor included. The product has a 46mm titanium case with touchscreen technology. TAG Heuer Connected smartwatches are currently sold in four countries: the US, the UK, Japan and France. According to a company representative, the product has performed well, thanks to the strong demand from not only domestic luxury consumers in these store locations, but also foreign shoppers.

With the launch of Apple Watch in April 2015, wearable technology has gained significant attention. TAG Heuer Connected is a unique example of luxury brands entering wearable technology. Other luxury brands view TAG Heuer Connected as a benchmark for how luxury wearable technology might perform in the future, and are paying close attention to the brand's performance. In the meantime, traditional watchmakers will look to strengthen their offering by developing new innovative designs and pursuing technological advances in response to the emergence of smartwatches and wearable technology.

Ethics and sustainability

As consumers become more aware of the importance of the environment and sustainability, companies in various industries are using more sustainable materials to

manufacture their products. Watch manufacturers are no exception as they showcased their efforts to become more environmentally friendly. Chopard started "the Journey" project in 2013, which aims to work towards the goal of sustainable and ethical luxury. As part of the project, Chopard launched the world's first watch made of Fairmined gold from a South American community. In addition to support the mining communities, the Fairmined certification was created to guarantee that the gold was extracted in a responsible manner, the miners were provided fair payment and the natural sources are protected. At the show, Chopard presented L.U.C Perpetual Chrono which is a part of the Fairmined label. The launch of sustainable products allows Chopard to differentiate itself from other brands and helps the brand to satisfy consumers' desire to feel luxurious and "responsible" at the same time.

Big watch sizes

The size of watches has increased since the early 2000s, and the trend toward big watch sizes will continue as many of the products displayed at the show featured a larger case width. Examples include: The Royal Oak Offshore Diver Chronograph by Audemars Piguet (42mm), Excalibur Spider Double Tourbillon by Roger Dubuis (47mm), and MCT-S2.0b by Manufacture Contemporaine Du Temps (46mm).

While personal taste and sizes of wearers' wrists are main factors consumers consider when deciding on the size of a watch, the latest fashion trends are also reflected in new collections of luxury timepieces.

Customisation

Customisation became key in the luxury goods market over the past few years, as it signals that a product is rare and exclusive. Luxury brands are active in offering customisable products to accommodate various consumers' needs and preferences. Jaeger-LeCoultre offers the customisable Atelier Reverso series. At the event, a company representative showed its official website that allows consumers to create their own Reverso watch, choosing from a wide selection of dials, straps, colours and materials. Also, the brand exhibited special edition timepieces, designed in collaboration with shoemaker Christian Louboutin to mark the 85th anniversary of the Reverso.

American brands

While the majority of luxury timepieces are imported from Switzerland in the US, American luxury brands strengthened their selections of watches to increase brand recognition. Tiffany & Co displayed its newly launched collection of luxury timepieces at the show. Euromonitor International estimated that Tiffany & Co led sales in the luxury jewellery and timepieces category with a value share of 12% in 2014 in the US. Tiffany & Co is a coveted luxury brand when it comes to jewellery, but the brand struggles to compete against Swiss brands in the watch market. According to the company's financial report, jewellery accounts for over 90% of Tiffany & Co's sales, while timepieces represented approximately 1% of Tiffany's total net sales in FY2015. Many Swiss brands are known for their high-quality and heritage that resonates with wealthy consumers and promotes brand loyalty. As watches have considerable growth potential, Tiffany & Co will need to invest significant resources in marketing to increase awareness of its brand, heritage and product range in watches.

