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Brands weigh cost against popularity of watch fairs

Some big names yet to return, favouring other channels. By **Robin Swithinbank**

Is the watch fair debate finally over? Organisers and exhibitors seem to think so. After years of mud-slinging and uncertainty — peaking with the very public demise of the Baselworld Swiss megafair — the clock may no longer be ticking for the survival of the watch show. But, while the dust has settled, divisions remain.

"There is big momentum in Watches and Wonders," says Matthieu Humair, chief executive of the Watches and Wonders Geneva Foundation (WWGF), the non-profit organiser of what is now Switzerland's only major watch fair, opening on March 27. "It's the fashion week of the [watch] industry."

Rolex, Patek Philippe, Cartier and Tag Heuer will be among the exhibitors at this year's event, which is expected to break attendance records. The 2022

gathering recorded almost 22,000 visitors but, unlike last year, the fair will now be open to the public at the weekend, when Humair expects 10,000 paying customers to show up.

Last year's fair was closed to the public but, following an outcry from exhibitors and the success of watch events designed to reach outside the industry — such as the biennial Dubai Watch Week hosted by retailer Ahmed Seddiqui & Sons — the foundation has changed tack.

"We want to involve the general public and talk about watchmaking not only in Palexpo [the host convention centre] but in Geneva," Humair says. Tickets to the public days will cost SFr70 (\$76), which could bring in meaningful revenues but, given exhibitors are paying millions, the impact on the organisers' bottom line may not be as significant.

Over the same week, another fair called Time to Watches will also return to Geneva. Last year's debut event attracted 36 smaller watch brands, such as Corum, Vulcain and Louis Erard.

Exhibitors believe the tide has turned. "Before the pandemic, everyone was questioning the fairs," says Jean-Marc Pontroué, chief executive of Panerai, one of the Richemont group of brands exhib-

iting in Geneva. "There was a general agreement and, to be cool, you had to say the show was useless. But we need this."

Some critics admit they got it wrong. "I was convinced that, after Baselworld, the brands would go over to digital content," says Oliver Müller, founder of Swiss luxury consultancy LuxeConsult. "But the first W&W . . . that happened digitally . . . was a disaster. Even technology-driven brands like Apple or Tesla need public events to create an atmosphere. Fairs still can create the magic of physical encounters."

If shows such as W&W are now useful, it is because they have reorganised. The old-fashioned business-to-business sales model is all but gone, replaced by a stronger focus on the end consumer.

"Today, I don't care about the sales results, because I have them before the show starts," says Pontroué, adding that the Geneva fair costs him "millions" and is one of his business's "top three investments for the year".

"What I care about now is the press and media coverage," he says. "I have that feedback every day [at the fair]. And it pays for the investment in W&W Geneva big time. The fact you have one

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'Even tech-driven brands like Apple need public events to create an atmosphere'



Pinning hopes on symbols of resistance

Olena Zelenska, Ukraine's first lady, wore a Valeriya Guzema-designed brooch on her visit to the White House last summer. Now, almost a year after the Russian invasion of her country began, Ukrainian jewellers have been revisiting

symbols of their national identity in their work. Meanwhile, museums in the war-torn country are working hard to protect their heritage — and to recover looted artefacts.

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'When Beyoncé bought my earrings, I became a brand'

Profile Fernando Jorge puts his success down to business acumen as much as design talent, writes *Maria Doultou*

Establishing a successful international jewellery brand from scratch is not the easiest of tasks. But, when Brazilian-born Fernando Jorge set up his company in the UK in 2012, he did not expect his jewellery designs to become celebrity favourites in less than a decade.

His tactile, curvaceous jewels have been worn by Michelle Obama, Beyoncé, Angelina Jolie, Rihanna and Charlize Theron, to name a few. And, in the past 10 years, he has won prestigious awards, including four Design awards from the Couture Jewellery show in Las Vegas and a Gem Award for Jewellery Design in 2019 from the Jewelers of America association.

Originally known more for his gold and gemstone jewels, it was Jorge's Brilliant diamond collection that propelled him forward. "When Beyoncé spontaneously bought the Disco earrings in 2018," says Jorge, "I felt I was moving from being a designer to becoming a brand." This kind of high-profile endorsement helped him not only make a name for himself in London but also around the world, with his jewellery stocked by 40 retailers. Jorge opened a new showroom in Mayfair just a few months ago, leaving his former Shoreditch premises behind.

However, design is not all it takes to build a global brand. "Having the right retailers from the start was key in building credibility, as good design is not always enough," says Jorge.

"Wholesale can be tricky and the demands are brutal but, when I set up my brand, I already had enough experience to know that, for this to work, my jewels had to be very desirable and stand out, yet well thought-out and easy to wear."

The Mayfair showroom was a response to the demand for higher-priced diamond jewels – as well as clients seeking more valuable and bespoke pieces. Jorge's website offers around 800 items – 400 designs and their variations – with prices ranging from nearly £750 to more than £50,000, and with

private sales of higher value pieces of up to £700,000.

The US is the company's dominant market, followed by the Middle East then the UK. Jorge reported 70 per cent year-on-year growth in 2021, and expects 40 per cent growth for 2022. His main wholesale and retail partners are luxury department stores Bergdorf Goodman and Harrods, as well as London-based MatchesFashion and Le Bon Marché in Paris.

"The consignment model works well when the fit is right and product sells, as the retailer provides the real estate, experienced sales people and a loyal

Amorim herself. There, he immersed himself not just in developing designs but the world of retail, marketing and branding.

Jorge's next move was a masters in jewellery design at London's Central Saint Martins college in 2008. "I wanted to make jewellery that asked to be touched," he says. "I didn't realise that I was playing into the stereotype of Brazil by looking at jewellery in such a sensual way. It's ironic that I had to come to London to get in touch with Brazil, and the MA polished my point of view."

"What is remarkable about his work is the formal expression of sensuality using the vocabulary of jewellery in a very powerful way," says Simon Fraser, who is the course director at CSM and taught Jorge. "It is in how he carves stones, the use of articulations and in his recent [high-end line of diamond] Brilliant jewels. They always have a backbone of sensuality, and that makes them wearable."

The Brilliant range opened the door to a higher realm of jewellery. Though costing some 10 times as much as his usual designs, the first £48,000 Disco diamond earrings sold faster than any of his previous collections on their launch at the Vegas Couture show in 2017.

Fresh out of CSM, Jorge was able to act on opportunities. "I had a huge, unique advantage when I left CSM as I had already worked in the industry. The experience of seeing the commercial success of designs I had done for former employers gave me a blind confidence in my work. So, in my degree show, I decided to put all my money into making my jewels in gold." The gamble paid off and he sold pieces from his degree show, with his first retailer being luxury shopping site CoutureLab.

Today, Jorge uses a workshop in São Paulo and another in Italy for diamond jewels. The operational side of his business is in the hands of his sisters, Renata and Paula, bringing his total number of staff to 19. While Jorge currently has full control of the company, he plans to formalise the partnership with his sisters by giving them shares.

As for the future, Jorge is working on collaborations with retailers, auction houses and exhibitions that will introduce his jewels to collectors at the top end of the jewellery world – where the boundaries blur between art, jewellery and investment.



Graff floats rare oval diamond necklace

A rare 50-carat D flawless oval diamond is at the centre of a new necklace unveiled by Graff in Paris this week. Handcrafted for more than a month at the jeweller's London workshop, the 18-carat white gold piece (right) also features 100.25 carats of pear-shaped, emerald-cut, oval, round and baguette-cut diamonds. The main gem, just over 30mm x 20mm in size, was discovered in Lesotho. The pendant is designed so it appears that this central stone is floating on the emerald-cut diamond surround, with an invisible setting holding it in place.

Four seasons

De Beers explores the transformation of nature through the seasons in its new Metamorphosis high jewellery collection. The first set in the collection, Prelude, which launched during Couture in Paris this week, introduces all four seasons, with each represented by a different line of diamonds using different metals, stone settings and colours. The nine pieces include an ear cuff (right) that features four titanium chrysalises, which are a "prelude" to the seasons to be unveiled in the second chapter of the collection. The diamond jeweller will launch the next pieces during Couture in Paris in July.

She sells sea shells

London-based diamond jeweller Jessica McCormack takes inspiration from sunny days along the shore for her upcoming spring/summer 2023 collection. Beaches, which launches at the end of February, includes 11 pieces that are designed to be worn either on their own or layered with existing lines. The design for two bangles of coiled gold and a matching ring is based on the twists of a conch shell, or the spirals of a narwhal's tusk, while scallop shells feature in other pieces. Asymmetrical freshwater pearls are hand knotted on olive silk with a

single off-centre diamond for three necklaces, a bracelet and an anklet.

Added links

Tasaki is adding seven new pieces to its Fine Links series on February 1. Designed for the Japanese brand by Thai-American fashion designer Thakoon Panichgul, the jewellery juxtaposes contrasting elements: yellow gold links are combined with Akoya pearls and diamonds in designs for two pendants, two rings, two pairs of earrings, and one ear cuff. The smaller one is decorated with diamonds and the larger one is unadorned. Tasaki launched Fine Links with three pieces in 2019.

Reign of Spain

An early 17th-century eagle pendant is among the pieces of Spanish Golden Age jewellery on show at the Royal Academy of Arts in London until April 10. Featured in the gallery's *Spain and the Hispanic World* exhibition, the pendant – made of gold, enamel, emerald and pearls – is one of half a dozen jewels on display from the collection of the Hispanic Society Museum & Library in New York. Other jewellery pieces include a 16th-century pendant in the shape of a centaur, made from gold, champlevé and transparent enamel, sapphires, rubies, and pearls.

Suite treats

Garrard's new Couture collection is made up of four one-of-a-kind high jewellery suites that are each centred around different precious stones. Launched this week, the Amazonia set highlights emeralds alongside diamonds, tsavorite and malachites, while Mustique is focused on aquamarine. The Desert Star suite includes four pieces that showcase morganite and three that feature tourmalines. Northern Lights pairs opal with diamonds, multicoloured sapphires, green tourmalines, tsavorites and gold-to-white mother-of-pearl.

Antique attractions

A London gallery specialising in ancient art will exhibit its first full collection of jewellery at TEFAP Maastricht (March 11-19). Kallos Gallery, which has

previously sold ancient jewellery and 19th and 20th-century antique pieces featuring ancient elements, branched out into designing its own fine jewellery in December 2021. Its new pendants, earrings, rings and bracelets consist of ancient coins, intaglios and amulets set into modern 18-carat gold mounts.

Other exhibitors confirmed for the art, antiques and design fair include Indian jeweller Bhagat, German house Hemmerle, and Van Cleef & Arpels.

African influences

The latest collection from Aymer Maria, which launched its debut line Pilastro at London department store Liberty last month, will be available to buy from February 2. The brand's African-Caribbean British founder Ruth Aymer draws on her west African heritage in her designs. The new Malian collection is inspired by the architectural style of the Great Mosque of Djenné in Mali and the Larabanga Mosque in Ghana. Twelve pieces, made from nine-carat recycled gold and diamonds, include three ring designs, five styles of earrings, one bracelet, a bangle and two necklaces.

Shining Knight

Bonhams will show a belle époque diamond tiara at the Grand Palais Éphémère in Paris on February 2 ahead of offering it for sale at auction in the French capital on February 16. The property of a European noble family, the piece (c 1905) has an openwork floral design, and features approximately 25 carats of diamonds mounted in gold and platinum. The tiara (estimate €50,000–€70,000) is attributed to the Italian jeweller Giuseppe Knight.

Capsule cachet

Chaumet has unveiled new designs in its Liens family of jewellery this month. The Liens Inséparable high jewellery capsule collection comprises two chapters: the first features four white gold pieces with white diamonds and blue sapphires; the second has five pieces made from white gold and white diamonds only. The French house has also introduced four new rings and three variations of a pendant necklace to its Liens Evidence fine jewellery range. The Jeux de liens line is boosted by the addition of new designs for a pendant necklace and ring in white gold and blue sapphire.

Kate Youde

