

EVENTS/CAUSES

Watchmakers flaunt virtuosity, classicism at SIHH 2015 via social media

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Van Cleef & Arpels' Carpe Koi watch

By JEN KING

For the 25th annual Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie, 16 of the world's top watchmakers convened in Geneva Jan. 19-23 to unveil their most creative and avant-garde timepieces amid those who share a passion for horology.

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Although the event is trade- and invite-only, social media has greatly improved visibility for participating watchmakers, and those that are not showing at SIHH, but want to capitalize on industry attention. Social media posts have ranged from photos and videos of newly unveiled timepieces to cocktail party recaps to underscore the glamour of the industry, used as a way to virtually include horologists unable to attend the event in person.

"They are able to elevate and separate themselves from the pack of brands that present at Baselworld and other trade shows throughout the year," said Michael Groffenberger, senior category director of fine jewelry and watches for [The RealReal](#), San Francisco.

"Because of the exclusive and luxurious nature of SIHH, presenting watchmakers are not competing with other low-end brands," he said. "They remain the sole focus of the trade

journalists and buyers attention, which results in amazing exposure for them.

"The show's success is an indication of the success of the brands presenting there. They have been able to capture the attention of the public and of the retailers by removing quite a bit of noise caused by hundreds of other smaller watchmakers."

Ahead of the times

Organized by the Fondation de la Haute Horlogerie, the annual event is seen as a "tribute to the skills and expertise that have established Geneva as the foremost centre for fine watchmaking in the world."

The 16 watch manufacturers that were featured at the 2015 installation of SIHH included A. Lange & Söhne, Audemars Piguet, Baume & Mercier, Cartier, Greubel Forsey, IWC Schaffhausen, Jaeger-LeCoultre, Montblanc, Panerai, Parmigiani Fleurier, Piaget, Ralph Lauren, Richard Mille, Roger Dubuis, Van Cleef & Arpels and Vacheron Constantin.



SIHH promotional image

Fabienne Lupo, chairwoman and managing director of the Fondation de la Haute Horlogerie, said in a statement that "SIHH is the pulse of the watchmaking profession, and as always when emotion is at its height, this pulse beats stronger than ever."

To that effect, the presenting watchmakers displayed pieces that combine the foremost in watchmaking technology paired with fine craftsmanship.

Presenters showed off this blend of "inventiveness" and "classicism" on social media to better secure their ranking in the minds of affluent consumers and watch collectors.

For example, Swiss watchmaker Vacheron Constantin did just that by sharing its latest collection Harmony in a series of daily social media postings.

Created to celebrate the watch maison's 260th anniversary, the collection includes a Tourbillon Chronograph version limited to 26-pieces, a 10-piece Ultra-Thin Grande Complication Chronograph, a Chronograph small model and a Dual Time watch.

In addition, Vacheron celebrated its anniversary with the Metiers d'Art Mecaniques Gravees Calibre 2260 Tourbillon and the Calibre 4400, watches that look back at the maison's heritage. These watches include engraving on their faces, done by hand over 10 days, reminiscent of the first pocket watch created by Vacheron in 1755.

These watches, although traditional in design, connect heritage to the modern watch wearer in a fashionable way while highlighting Vacheron's accomplishments in the

industry.



Vacheron Constantin's Metiers d'Art Mecaniques Gravees Calibre 2260 Tourbillon

Similarly, Jaeger-LeCoultre posted to social media about its latest creations but took a more hands-on approach to interacting with horologists, both in attendance at SIHH and at home.

Jaeger-LeCoultre's pieces that debuted at SIHH were themed, with all paying homage to astronomy by featuring a moonphase complication of some kind.

Pieces highlighted included the Duomètre Sphérotourbillon Moon watch, the Atmos Marqueterie Céleste table clock, the Rendez-Vous Moon timepiece and the Master Grande Tradition Grande Complication wristwatch.

Embedded Video: [//www.youtube.com/embed/P1iv1jRmPuk](https://www.youtube.com/embed/P1iv1jRmPuk)

Jaeger-LeCoultre's The Origin of Time

Jaeger-LeCoultre saw SIHH as the prime opportunity to show brand cohesion and modernization by releasing an app relative to the debuts unveiled at the trade show.

The watchmaker is helping owners set their watches' moonphase complications without a trip to the boutique through a new mobile application.



Moonphase indicator on the JLC Moonphase app by Jaeger-LeCoultre

Available for Apple devices, the “JLC Moonphase” provides owners of Jaeger-LeCoultre watches with tutorials to correctly set the moonphase complications on their timepiece. Producing an app that helps the consumer with maintenance may be a more welcomed download compared to one that simply pushes ecommerce or heavily showcases timekeeping technology ([see story](#)).

French jeweler Cartier went a step further than its contemporaries for SIHH.

Instead of relying on traditional Web-based content accessed through social postings, Cartier dedicated an entire issue of its Rouge Cartier digital magazine to fine watchmaking.

Although Cartier posted to social media nearly every day of SIHH to share its latest watches, the jeweler’s packaging of Rouge Cartier N°39 stands out because of its interactive elements.

For instance, as the consumer scrolls, watch mechanisms of Cartier’s latest four pieces come into fruition to form a timepiece paired with detailed information to emulate what an SIHH attendee would have had explained to him in person.

To further connect with consumers unable to attend, or even to those who were at SIHH

but want to revisit what was seen at the show, Cartier included Rouge Cartier N°39 in an email blast. In terms of outreach, this may be the best strategy for Cartier as the upper tier of affluent consumers do not frequent social media as frequently as aspirational or occasional consumers.



Excerpt from Cartier's Rouge Cartier N°39 for SIHH

While others focused on functionality, French jeweler Van Cleef & Arpels went for extravagance with the Cadenas watch and Pavée edition as part of its “Poetry of Time” display theme.

These pieces, especially the Carpe Koi watch bracelet, show the house’s virtuosity and dedication to art. This 3D timepiece for instance, set with 8,000 colored stones and created over 3,450 hours, holds the watch face within the fish’s mouth.



Van Cleef & Arpels' Carpe Koi watch bracelet

Socially involved

Even though watch consumers are unable to attend many of the international horology

events, social media allows enthusiasts to feel involved. These posts were mainly shared on Facebook, but this may not be the optimal platform for watchmakers to interact with consumers.

Digital Luxury Group's World Watch Report preview, released in time for the start of SIHH Jan. 19, notes that Instagram strategies offer a higher rate of engagement. The average engagement rate on the social image sharing platform among Haute Horlogerie brands is 3.76 percent, six times as high as on Facebook.

Of the Haute Horlogerie watchmakers surveyed, Audemars Piguet performed the best with a follower community of 181,846, as of press time, and an above-average engagement rate of 4.15 percent. But, Jaeger-LeCoultre and Roger Dubuis underperform on the platform with only 3.18 percent and 2.55 percent, respectively.

Like in other industries, engagement on Facebook has dropped as other platforms become more engaging in the minds of consumers. This shift in consumer behavior has resulted in a number of brands seeing community numbers fall ([see story](#)).

The inclusivity of social media allows watchmakers to reach all consumers.

"It is a way to keep the show itself exclusive and focused on the influencers in the industry, while inviting fans to be part of the action through social media," Mr. Groffenberger said.

"I think due to the visual nature of watches, Instagram has been very powerful for the brands at this show, and I think more than the brands, the journalists such as WatchAnish and Hodinkee have developed a very strong voice on social media that is helping carry the message of the watch brands," he said.

Final Take

Jen King, lead reporter on Luxury Daily, New York

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