

JEWELRY

Piaget, Hublot get close to U.S. consumers, supporting watch exports

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The Palm Court in Miami Design District will host the WWM gala. Image credit: Miami Design District

By BRIELLE JAEKEL

As the watch industry continues to struggle within the United States, Watches & Wonders is giving watchmakers a platform to unveil their new designs for the first time in the country.

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With smartwatches threatening Swiss watchmakers' presence in the U.S., it is important for these brands to establish more of a connection with U.S. consumers. Piaget, Hublot, Jaeger-LeCoultre and Bulgari are among 21 Swiss brands looking to engage horologists and enthusiasts with product previews and watchmaking workshops.

"There is a growing importance to this market, and specifically, the Miami Design District, as a destination for luxury and fine watchmaking," said Fabienne Lupo, chairwoman and managing director of the [Fondation de la Haute Horlogerie](#), who organized Watches & Wonders. "Miami is also very central and strategic from a business point of view, as it's also a gateway to connect with consumers from Latin and South America."

Watch exports

The U.S. is an increasingly important region for watch brands, but last May the market saw the biggest drop it had ever seen.

According to the Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry's monthly statistics, United States saw its steepest fall since then, at 9.5 percent this past December.

Watches overall in 2017 did see improvements, but during the peak holiday shopping season, watch industry exports had weak growth in December despite a relatively low comparison base. In recent months the Swiss watch export statistics have been showing performance recovery, but the sector remains challenged overall ([see more](#)).

Euromonitor also noted a 6 percent decline for watches' volume and value in the U.S. in 2017, attributing declining demand to a strong dollar.

That makes the Watches & Wonders event in Miami important for brands looking to combat these issues.



Promotional image for the inaugural FHH's Watches & Wonders Miami. Image credit: FHH

These brands hope to establish a close relationship with existing watch fans as well as new customers with product walkthroughs and special interactive sessions, all related to watchmaking.

While Piaget will be showing off its Altiplano Ultimate Automatic 910P, which it is touting as the thinnest automatic watch in the world, other brands are making a connection with attendees via hands-on experiences.



Piaget's watch, noted as the thinnest in the world. Image credit: Piaget.

For instance, Phillips' head of watches will be working with guests, giving them tips on how to build their watch collections.

Hublot will be exhibiting how watches and their movements are manufactured, while Jaeger-LeCoultre will help attendees actually do it themselves.

One of Bulgari's most important watchmakers will be presenting as well, so enthusiasts can meet one of the greats.

There will also be an installation comprised of nine films with virtual reality experiences by artists such as Maarten Baas and Ivn Argote.

Participants can play with three adventures that help them get acquainted with time keeping instruments.

Watches & Wonders will debut in Miami Feb. 16 to Feb. 19. The event coincides with the Miami Design District Concours and the Miami Yacht Show, looking to draw attendees from the increased tourism in the area this

weekend.

Watch shows 2018

After years of this downward slope for the watch industry, the sector is finally seeing positive news as it begins to gain traction with a strong total value as digital retail and smartwatches continue to threaten its existence.

The first high-end watch show of 2018 began amongst this long-awaited bounce back for the industry and included a first-time presenter. The Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie (SIHH) began on Monday, Jan. 15 in Geneva, where French leather goods brand Herms made its debut as a presenter ([see more](#)).

"Watches & Wonders Miami is not a traditional trade show," said "It's a series of events targeted to consumers, so it is a very unique experience as an event of this type has not existed before in this market.

"It's important as WWM provides brands the opportunity to connect to new and existing customers, giving people first access to new product, which has not happened before," It really is a unique opportunity as brands can capitalize on the momentum and excitement of the weekend activities, as well as the alignment with the Miami Design District Concours and the Miami Yacht Show."

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