

JEWELRY

Luxury watchmakers focus on craftsmanship, heritage at SIHH

January 15, 2019



Luxury watchmakers, including Piaget, flock to SIHH. Image credit: Piaget

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Luxury watchmakers have gathered in Geneva for the annual Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie (SIHH), hoping to build off the positive growth for the sector in 2018.

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Less concerned about competing with luxe tech items such as smartwatches and more open to embracing digital marketing, many watchmakers are drawing inspiration from their storied heritage. Audemars Piguet, Piaget, Montblanc and IWC Schaffhausen are among the brands exhibiting and releasing new timepieces to commemorate the occasion.

"SIHH is such a valuable opportunity because it showcases the best of the best in the watch industry," said Donnie Pacheco, founder of [Donnie P. Consulting](#), Seattle. "These are the true luxury watch brands and more importantly, watchmakers.

"The opportunity is that brands are able to tell their entire story of brand, history and craftsmanship through the eyes of the watchmaker and not just a marketing campaign," he said.

Watch launches

Swiss watchmaker Audemars Piguet launched a new collection in the lead up to SIHH.

Code 11.59 includes a self-winding chronograph, a perpetual calendar, a tourbillion overworked, a minute repeater supersonneire and a self-winding flying tourbillion. The timepieces have a distinct appearance with a round face and a 41mm case in white or rose gold.



Audemars Piguet launched a new collection, Code 11.59. Image credit: Audemars Piguet

Jaeger-LeCoultre is highlighting its dedication to watchmaking precision with its new Hybris Mechanica, a multi-axis Gyrotourbillon with a constant-force mechanism.

The Hybris Mechanica includes more than 20 complications, or functions aside from displaying hours and time. The watchmaker also released a short video that shows a digital recreation of its inner mechanics.

German watchmaker Montblanc used SIHH as a platform to introduce its nature-inspired Reconnect 1858. The new timepieces feature bronze cases, khaki-green dials and matching colored "NATO" straps.

Swiss watchmaker IWC Schaffhausen is also returning to its aviation roots with a new Spitfire Pilot watch collection.

IWC introduces the new Spitfire Pilot collection in an aviation-themed film

A film for the timepieces follows the creation of the Spitfire Pilot watches and the restoration of a 1943 Silver Spitfire in preparation of a round-the-world flight attempt.

"Watchmakers stand out from one another by being able to tell their story and inspiration," Mr. Pacheco said. "Often it comes from the history of the brand or how they are looking to move the craft forward."

Industry changes

Swiss watch exports have seen a rebound around the world, including in the United States.

The value of watches sent to the U.S. was up 17.6 percent in November 2018, far surpassing the average global growth of 3.9 percent, according to statistics from the Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry. After facing a tough climate in the U.S. the second largest watch market Swiss timepieces have seen a resurgence throughout 2018.

Globally, Swiss watch exports totaled 2.06 billion Swiss francs, or about \$2.08 billion at current exchange. November marked the first month that the industry's income has surpassed 2 billion francs since October 2015 ([see story](#)).

However, despite the efforts around SIHH, Richard Mille and Audemars Piguet had previously announced their withdrawal from major watch trade shows.

With the trade show model becoming almost irrelevant, watch brands are finally pivoting to embrace more modern strategies. The two brands announced this year's SIHH will be their last.

Audemars Piguet has been a part of the Switzerland-based watch trade show for 19 years and is looking to change direction in hopes to better prepare for the future ([see story](#)).