

WATCHES AND JEWELRY

Optimism in the air at SIHH

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Actor Hugh Jackman at SIHH 2019. Image courtesy of SIHH

By Barbara Palumbo

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GENEVA, Switzerland There was not a lot of playing-it-safe for the watch brands currently exhibiting at the 2019 edition of the Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie (SIHH) in Geneva, Switzerland.

Brands not only went outside of their comfort zones this week with their new novelties at the fair, but some chose to do so in big ways, leaving many collectors and retailers feeling relieved after what seemed to be years of not much change.

Good times?

According to [data supplied by the Federal Customs Administration and released by the Federation of the Swiss watch industry FH](#), average Swiss watch sales figures showed a noteworthy increase in 2018 in most major markets.

This news alone was cause enough for those attending the fair to feel more relaxed. But when paired with an abundance of flowing Champagne and celebrity friends of the brand such as actors Hugh Jackman and Pierce Brosnan, the vibe felt more like a happy hour at Chateau Marmont in Los Angeles than a traditional trade event.

For watch brand Richard Mille a brand that will not be exhibiting at the [SIHH](#) after this year this year's edition offered the perfect playground for its heavily talked-about candy-themed "BonBon" watch collection a fun and colorful collection inspired by childhood candies and fruity treats. The watches showcased Richard Mille's unadulterated fun side and dared potential buyers to find theirs, as well.

Audemars Piguet released a watch unlike anything the company has made in the past the CODE 11.59 which, while met with mixed reviews, particularly from those who both wax poetic about the brand's iconic Royal Oak collection and who spend an abundance amount of time on Instagram, most certainly deserved the "most talked about watch at the SIHH" award. CEO Franois-Henry Bennahmias spoke passionately about the company's choice to create a watch that would showcase the brand's independence while standing up for something beyond what the watch world masses deem acceptable.

There were, of course, brands who ran with the successes they had after last year's edition of the SIHH, but that did so by focusing not just on the often-joked about "strap color changes."

Affordable Swiss brand Baume et Mercier added to their already popular Baumatic collection originally released in 2018 with watches such as the new Baumatic Perpetual Calendar, which includes functions such as the date, day of the week, month of the year and moon phase complication.

Watch out

What was noticeably missing but welcomed by several members of the press from this year's edition of the SIHH was the overabundance of out-of-the-woodwork Instagram influencers.

The overwhelming majority of press attendees were writers, podcasters, photographers and bloggers, which should be seen as a sign for what is to come not just in the watch business, but in every industry that has questions about whether or not the realm of the influencer would be one that would stand the test of time.

Overall, this year's edition of the SIHH felt "chill" for lack of a better term.

The show floor was filled with men of all ages in stunning suits and beautiful women who knew just as much about the watch industry as their male counterparts.

Those who run the fair do so in an impeccably perfect way. Attendees are welcomed, treated well, fed to their heart's desire, offered comfortable seating when needed, and this year, they were also offered extended hours should they have needed to stay a little longer to finish their business dealings.

If the experiences had at the 2019 Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie reflects the watch industry at all, then the industry need not worry about its future, because according to the SIHH, not only is it bright and colorful, but it is filled with Champagne and candy, too.

Barbara Palumbo is founder of [Adornmentality](#), Atlanta.

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