

WATCHES AND JEWELRY

## How luxury watch brands are celebrating the Year of the Rat

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*Asian markets account for half of all Swiss watches sold in the market. Image courtesy of Panerai*

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Every year, roughly a half-dozen top luxury watch brands help celebrate the **Chinese New Year** with custom-made timepieces. The reasoning behind this is that Asian countries make up nearly half of the Swiss watch industry's approximate \$21 billion in sales.

Creating special timepieces for the Asian market and Chinese customers around the world sets certain watch brands up for success, and Chinese New Year is the perfect time for brands to unveil limited-edition pieces that reflect the fine arts of hand painting and engraving.

The Chinese New Year starts on Jan. 25, 2020, and runs until Feb. 4, 2020.

This year, which is the **Year of the Rat**, is supposed to be a lucky one that brings success and new beginnings.

One of the most highly celebrated holidays in Asian countries and Asian communities around the world, Chinese New Year is based on the lunar calendar, so the dates change each year along with the astrological zodiac signs.

According to traditional Chinese calendars, the rat is the first sign of the zodiac.

The legend behind the rat becoming one of the Chinese zodiac signs goes back to when Buddha summoned all the animals to visit him before he entered Nirvana.

The small rat climbed onto the back of a buffalo to get there faster, and he even beat out the cat, resulting in the two animals becoming arch enemies.

The rat is usually associated with resourcefulness, intelligence, luck, prosperity and optimism.

With these stories in mind, special-edition, Year of the Rat Chinese zodiac watches are designed to depict the rat in positive settings as it takes center stage. Other brands simply refer to the Year of the Rat in more subtle ways.



*Blancpain Villeret Traditional Chinese Calendar retails for \$87,800. Image courtesy of Blancpain*

**Blancpain**, for instance, portrays a tiny rat at the typical 12-o'clock position on the dial of its all-new Villeret Traditional Chinese Calendar watch.

This incredibly complicated timepiece, made in a limited edition of 50 pieces, is the result of five years of research and development. It incorporates the traditional Chinese calendar with double-hour indication, signs of the zodiac, Gregorian calendar and moon phases.

These functions and others are depicted on the white grand feu enamel dial, and the complicated, self-winding movement powering the 45mm white gold watch consists of a massive 464 parts.

The watch also boasts a rotor engraved with the rat, which is visible via a sapphire case back.



*Panerai Luminor Sealand Year of the Rat retails for \$23,600. Image courtesy of Panerai*

Conversely, **Panerai** opts to showcase its rat more prominently.

For its Luminor Sealand Year of the Rat watch, created in a limited edition of 88 pieces, the rat is etched and painted on a decorative hunter-type hinged cover with a mirror inside that protects the dial beneath.

The 44mm stainless-steel watch is decorated with an ancient Italian art called *sparsello*, wherein a master craftsman uses a tiny knife to etch the motif and then layers the carved areas with gold threads that are hammered into place. Because of this, it takes more than 50 hours to create each cover.

Meanwhile, the watch is powered by an ultra-thin mechanical movement made entirely in-house at the brand's Neuchatel Manufacture.



*Chopard L.U.C XP Year of the Rat retails for \$24,600. Image courtesy of Chopard*

Similarly, **Chopard's** L.U.C. XP Year of the Rat watch depicts the rat prominently on the dial in all its glory.

Limited to 88 pieces forged in 18-karat rose gold, the watch features a dial made using the ancient Japanese art of Urushi painting.

The Urushi lacquer, which is used for the hand-painted dial, is made from the sap or resin from an Urushi tree. The sap can only be harvested once a year and, once harvested, needs to sit for several years before it can be treated to become soft enough with which to paint.

A single master artisan, Yamada Heinado, hand paints every dial and mixes the lacquer with flecks of gold to achieve depth and dimension.

In the Chopard watch, the rat is golden in hue, sits on an ear of corn, and is placed upon a midnight blue background.

The 40mm watch is powered by an extra-thin, self-winding L.U.C movement that has been finely finished by hand in Chopard's workshops.

These are just three examples of the lengths fine watch brands go to so they can fulfill the desires of the ever-important **Chinese market**.

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