

WATCHES AND JEWELRY

Bulgari CEO Jean-Christophe Babin on its unique Chinese clientele and battling the coronavirus

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On Feb. 6, Bulgari announced that it had made a major donation to the Lazzaro Spallanzani Hospital in Rome, which is where a team that isolated the virus in less than 48 hours is working to find a cure and develop a vaccine for it. Image credit: Shutterstock

By [Roberta Naas](#)

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Easily one of the most well known luxury brand names in the world, [Bulgari](#) has established a strong presence in mainland China by researching and catering to the individual tastes of the market.

Owned by luxury conglomerate [LVMH](#), Bulgari CEO Jean-Christophe Babin said that he recognizes how China has been the fastest-developing luxury market in the world, responsible for a large share of the world's luxury goods consumption.

With a much younger luxury-goods clientele than most countries, China is by far the main driving power when it comes to product development and marketing.

According to Mr. Babin, the biggest challenge for luxury brands vying for the Chinese audience is finding the perfect blend of product and target marketing that appeals to younger, wealthy customers.

"Chinese clients are buying the iconic collections such as B.zero1 and Serpenti, like the rest of the world, but there are some specificities in that market that we cater to, so you will find certain materials and Bulgari products there that you won't find in the rest of the world," Mr. Babin said.

Among those nuances, said Mr. Babin, is a request for particular stones that the Chinese market prefers over others. Jade, for instance, has a long history and tradition in the country, as does malachite and ruby.

As such, the brand creates special-edition pieces of jewelry and watches that use these materials. The assortment is similar to the global demand, but with a focus on specialty stones and gold.

This year, for instance, Bulgari created a [Year of the Rat](#) Special Edition Fiorever Lunar New Year necklace bedecked in rubies instead of diamonds because of the emotional appeal the rich, red stone holds for Chinese

clientele.

Bulgari also offers a Serpenti pendant and bracelet created with jade insets as well as several watches (Octo and Serpenti) with malachite accents.

Plans for 2020

Today, 25 years after entering the Chinese market, Bulgari has more than 30 boutiques in 22 cities including a store in Hong Kong's Peninsula Hotel and is planning to expand.

The goal is to open three more stores in three new cities in 2020 and, additionally, the luxury brand is putting a strong emphasis on the ecommerce field this year to help attract today's younger clientele.

"Our goal is to double the traffic on our Bulgari platform and [WeChat](#), so we can reach the people in outlying cities where we have no brick-and-mortar stores," Mr. Babin said.

The executive also notes that while the brand is "intensifying investment into ecommerce, it will, of course, continue to support the luxury boutique experience."

Additional efforts will be made this year to introduce the new [B.zero1 Rock](#) line to a younger clientele via new brand ambassadors all under the age of 30 and a new Bulgari brand campaign.

At last week's New York launch party for the B.zero1, a more unisex, geometric B.zero1 jewelry collection was unveiled to attract not only the millennial customer but also the Gen-Zer.

Supermodels and celebrities naturally stole the limelight at the event, among them model Lily Aldridge, actress Naomi Scott and American actress Zendaya.

Also, a celebrity who is part of Bulgari's new "Mai Troppo" 2020 campaign for celebrating life and happiness, Chinese-Canadian singer and actor [Kris Wu](#), was present.

Coronavirus challenge

Mr. Babin admits, like others, that the unfortunate pandemic in China will affect the market in some ways, but he is confident it will bounce back.

"We feel so terrible for our clients and customers there and hope the pandemic will be eradicated soon," Mr. Babin said.

To that end, the brand has implemented a host of measures aimed at aiding and supporting the victims.

On Feb. 6, the brand announced that it had made a major donation to the Lazzaro Spallanzani Hospital in Rome, which is where a team that isolated the virus in less than 48 hours is working to find a cure and develop a vaccine for it.

"The team of researchers can now work with the most technologically advanced tools, accelerating the achievement of results that will benefit everyone on the planet who are potential victims of the virus, starting in China," Mr. Babin said, who further noted that as of Jan. 27, the [brand donated](#) approximately \$2.3 million to the Chinese Red Cross Foundation to help with medical supply shortages in the city of Wuhan.

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