

JEWELRY

New generation of watch consumers shaping the future now: Watches and Wonders Geneva Foundation CEO

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Old-world craftsmanship meets highly-advanced technology in the new horological landscape. Image courtesy of Watches and Wonders Geneva

By EMILY IRIS DEGN

Luxury timepieces, part of a largely heritage-focused industry, are modernizing.

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This year, Watches and Wonders demonstrated this shift, featuring highly-immersive installations and futuristic models amongst the 49 exhibitors, up from last year's 38 ([see story](#)). In entering this new era, Matthieu Humair, former CEO of Fondation de la Haute Horlogerie, has been appointed CEO of the newly-formed Watches and Wonders Geneva Foundation, which will now take charge of organizing the event.

"This year's Watches and Wonders Geneva Salon was filled with spectacular exhibitions from the world's leading fine watchmaking Maisons," Mr. Humair said.

"Brands were incredibly creative in their approach with some using state-of-the-art projection technology and very open and large entrances to deliver truly immersive experiences."

In this Q&A, Mr. Humair sheds a light on the modern offerings of Watches and Wonders 2023, as well as what to expect for next year's anticipated event. Here is the dialogue:

What innovations did you see amongst watchmaking displays that you thought pushed the envelope the most this year?

In addition to debuting their newest timepieces, the exhibiting Maisons at Watches and Wonders Geneva also use the Salon as an opportunity to bring their brands to life and delight the attending retailers and press. Every space is meticulously crafted and visually engaging to provide a unique and memorable experience for visitors.

Specific animations such as watchmaker demonstrations were organized within the booths, allowing visitors to meet the women and men who actually make the watches.

Some Maisons even delivered an elevated level of hospitality by serving specialty cocktails or working with world-

class chefs to offer guests a special pastry or other culinary treats.



The displays at the event were tailored to the rising demand for engaging marketing. Image courtesy of Watches and Wonders Geneva

How is Watches and Wonders working to continue making events more immersive every year?

This year, the Lab was a real think tank for watchmaking and presented technological and digital innovations of the exhibiting Maisons, as well as start-ups and schools. 12 innovative projects were presented around three themes: the use of new material; blockchain and NFT; and metaverse and augmented reality.

We are continuously upgrading our technology at the Salon, on our website and through our app to deliver the best possible experience for visitors.

Our hybrid concept has been designed to constantly be able to adapt to the changing context, by combining a physical salon with digital solutions that meet market expectations.

With sustainability being such a high priority among consumers, is the organization incorporating it into the annual event?

Sustainability is certainly a focus and this year we made considerable strides.

All food products are responsibly sourced from sustainable agricultural producers, and Watches and Wonders Geneva is run on 100 percent natural energy from solar or hydroelectric sources.

Where is Watches and Wonders heading in the year ahead?

Watches and Wonders Geneva 2023 was a tremendous success with the show attracting 43,000 visitors, up from 22,000 last year. It's truly a global audience with 125 different nationalities represented.

This year, we welcomed the general public and more than 12,000 people attended the Salon over the weekend. What's quite interesting is that the average age was 35, so we are seeing Watches and Wonders Geneva being embraced by a younger generation which is great news.

We also created an "In the City" experience to further engage the general public and expand Watches and Wonders throughout the city of Geneva.

Our goal is to continue to build upon this success in the coming year.

We want to control our growth to ensure an optimal experience for our exhibiting Maisons, as well as the retailers, journalists and consumers that attend.

Innovation will continue and we will offer guests a look at the future of watchmaking through our Lab experience, along with special exhibitions and always a refined level of hospitality.

Watches and Wonders is more than an event. It is a watchmaking summit bringing together the entire industry. It allows the Watchmaking Maisons to speak with one voice, which is very strong, having a total reach of more than 600 million this year.



The "In the City" event took visitors to the streets of Geneva, contextualizing the event happening in what many consider to be the capital of watchmaking. Image courtesy of Watches and Wonders Geneva

What is the future of watches looking like, in your opinion?

The watchmaking industry is extremely creative with beautiful savoir-faire.

This year's Watches and Wonders Geneva is really a testament to that. The growth from previous years in terms of participating brands, as well as attending press, retailers and consumers, really demonstrates the tremendous interest in fine watchmaking and the overall strength and dynamism of our industry.

We saw incredible new products being introduced by our exhibitors and the response from the press and via social media was massive.

Perhaps most important, we are thrilled that Watches and Wonders Geneva is playing a crucial role in cultivating interest and enthusiasm with a new generation of watch consumers, as they are the future.

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