



AN AUDIENCE WITH JEAN-CLAUDE BIVER, CEO, HUBLOT



Jean-Claude Biver is one of those rare men who have left a mark on Swiss watchmaking. Jean-Claude has been involved in the watchmaking industry since 1975 and was instrumental in developing elite brands such as Audemars Piguet, Omega, Blancpain and presently Hublot. During this candid interview he shares with us his insights, his unique perspectives and refreshing approach to luxury watch-making.

How do you define luxury?

For me personally, my definition of luxury as an individual is three simple things. If you can have good health, the good fortune to have your job as your passion and have somebody love you, you are in luxury. You are close to paradise.

What differentiates Hublot from other brands?

At Hublot, what differentiates us is that we are not repeating tradition. We are interpreting tradition with the visions of the future. In the Swiss watch industry, most luxury brands are very faithful to tradition. In fact, when I owned Blancpain in 1982 it was traditional brand and kept it so. With Hublot I took the same traditional approach I had 20 years ago with Blancpain and fused it with new elements that traditional watch brands do not usually do. I added new elements of the future, like new materials. We mixed rubber with gold which is usually unacceptable for traditional brands. To make a complication watch in a ceramic case is also unconventional as the majority of brands place complications in gold or platinum. The fusion between tradition and future, the connection of tradition to the future is what is unique about Hublot.

What are the greatest opportunities for luxury brands?

Truly opportunities are as vast and wide as before. Demand has been slightly weakened or reduced because of the economic climate, but the basic structure of watch industry remains intact. Fortunately, we do not face structural crisis like the other industries. There is a crisis as a consequence of consumers spending less, but when consumers spend again, we will be safe. Our production, our concepts, our luxury watches are extremely well adapted and valued therefore our customers will come back and buy again. We have to carry on with our creativity, with innovation, our marketing investments and that's it.

What is your opinion on the potential of the Middle East?

The people in the Middle East are very sensitive to luxury. People of the Middle East have always considered that watches express your status and personality and as a result they have a true appreciation for watches. They appreciate the workmanship, the quality of the product and are truly passionate about watches. This is what makes the Middle East such an enormous



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market and can only be developed further. Even though the population is small, the tremendous wealth and watch consciousness of the consumers makes the market quite vast.

What are you looking forward to by speaking at Leaders in Luxury?

I look forward to giving my opinion about a part of the world that I love, it's my pleasure to be there and to meet people.

And even in difficult times like these why do you think its important that people still attend conferences?

I think in times like this for luxury, the more we attend conferences, the more we continue to develop with our activities, the more we continued to share with our peers the better. Now is not the moment to stop. I always tell my people now is the moment to invest, but in what? Invest in travel costs, in promotions, in research and development. Unless you believe the slump will last several years then perhaps you need to re-organise and look at your expenses. As long as we believe the crisis is short-term, that is, 6-18 months which is nothing in the history of a brand, then there's no reason to stop being active. In fact, on the contrary. We must invest in innovation, we must invest in marketing, we must invest more - not less!

What do you believe are secrets to marketing and branding success for luxury?

The key is that marketing and branding success is never due to just one element. The key is everything must be aligned. There must be total alignment between the message of your brand, between the product of your brand, between the communication of the brand and your distribution. If any of these are not in synch you will fail. If you have all these you have the tools you will be successful, provided that what you produce has aesthetic emotion and appeals to your consumer. If all four elements are right and the product is awful you will also fail.

If you had a piece of advice for young professional what would it be?

First of all, you should never stop learning. When we are young, we very often believe we know everything. And I realise when I was 40 that I have to start to learn, because through learning you grow richer and you improve yourself. Secondly, to must never forget to share. We must be prepared to share our knowledge, our experience, our success and failures. Once you share, you will find that people around you are ready to help which only makes you stronger. The sharing process is extremely important because it allows you access to other perspectives and knowledge. Learning enables you to adapt and improve your vision and ideas. So my advice is don't stop learning. Stay actively curious. Always ask yourself, what can I do differently or what can I do better? And never forget to share.