

# A Time Of CHANGE

THERE ARE FEW MORE IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE WATCH INDUSTRY CALENDAR THAN THE **BASELWORLD** TRADE SHOW. BUT WITH TECH COMPANIES TREADING ON THE TOES OF THE SWISS SUPER-BRANDS, CAN TRADITIONAL WATCHMAKING SURVIVE? LUXURY BRIEFING WENT TO BASEL TO FIND OUT

The Baselworld trade show is one the key dates on the watch industry's calendar. Launched in 1917, it welcomes jewellery and watch exhibitors from over 45 countries to showcase their latest offerings.

Crowds of horology experts, journalists and fine-jewellery enthusiasts descend on the Swiss city, which provides an ideal setting for native watch manufacturers and international watchmakers to showcase their wares.

Forty years ago, it was the 'quartz crisis' (when cheap battery-powered watches flooded the market) that threatened traditional watch brands. Today, tech companies like Apple, LG and Samsung are providing competition, with models like the Apple Watch and the Samsung Gear entering the market.

Taking that on board, high-end mechanical manufacturers have decided to make the leap into the smartwatch sphere. Hublot, for example, presented its new

Big Bang Referee; a limited-edition model, featuring Google's Wear OS technology, while Tag Heuer's Connected range mixed high-end looks with interactive tech.

While manufacturers seem buoyant in the face of new competition: the same can't be said of Baselworld itself. According to watch industry website, Hodinkee, visitor numbers are down by 30% to 100,000 since its 2014 peak. Meanwhile, there were 650 fewer

exhibitors this year than in 2017, with even Swiss brands dropping out – 130 this year, compared to 220 last.

The reasons for this drop in numbers are many, but many blame the high price of stalls, the rising price of the Swiss franc, and the general trade show market, which is being hit by the use of internet by brands to generate sales.

Here, three watch industry players tell Luxury Briefing how Baselworld was for them.



## LUXURY FOCUS



**THE WATCH DESIGNER:  
ADRIAN BUCHMANN,  
CHRISTOPHER WARD**

**From a design perspective what were the most significant changes you noticed this year?**

Baselworld has become a slightly smaller event – in both footprint and duration – and also more condensed. I don't think it's likely this 'downsizing' trend will change going forward, and it'll be interesting to see whether the big watch groups will decide to renew their contracts for 2020.

**Jean-Claude Biver, CEO of TAG Heuer said he'd welcome smartwatches at future Baselworlds. What's your view?**

Smartwatches have been a fantastic tool to promote mechanical watches: brands like Apple have seduced younger generations into being interested in watches, and to consider what they wear on their wrist. In time, I believe the more curious individuals in this generation will deepen their interest in watches and transform into mechanical watch-wearers.

**Which new launches impressed you most?**

Arnold & Son's new Globetrotter model due to its 3D dial, and mix between tradition and modernity.

**How long have you been in the mechanical watch industry? What changes have you noticed during that time?**

Christopher Ward created its first mechanical watch in 2005 and has transitioned most of its collection from quartz to mechanical movements. The most striking change we've seen since then is that the consumer is increasingly knowledgeable about movements. Which brands do you look to for inspiration? We look at every brand in the watch industry to understand the trends. But the inspiration for our watches comes mainly from other industries, such as automotive design, British history, technology and nature.

**What developments do you think you'll see over the next five years?**

More precision, higher performance and anti-magnetic calibres that won't need servicing.



**THE CEO: UWE AHRENDT,  
NOMOS GLASHÜTTE**

**Tell us about your Baselworld launches...**

For NOMOS Glashütte, Baselworld 2018 was not only about presenting new watches: this year we introduced a brand-new calibre [movement]: the neomatik date (DUW 6101), the second calibre of the neomatik class. It's a slender, elegant automatic calibre with a date that can be set forwards and backwards quickly and easily.

Equally new and distinct is the Autobahn model, our new large and sporty automatic watch with a dial of entirely new depths. We created it in collaboration with renowned product designer Werner Aisslinger and it comes in three versions. It launched earlier this year and already it's received a prestigious design prize: the Red Dot Award 2018.

**From a design perspective what were the most significant changes you noticed this year?**

We can't speak for the industry as a whole, but at NOMOS Glashütte we took a bold, new approach



**Perhaps now, in the internet age, trade fairs aren't as important as they once were. Yet for us, Baselworld is still an important fixture in the calendar, even if the significance has changed over the years.**

*Opening page:*  
Taking place in the Swiss city of Basel, Baselworld 2018 welcomes crowds of watch experts from around the world

*From left:*  
Adrian Buchmann, Senior Designer at luxury British watch brand, Christopher Ward; Uwe Ahrendt, CEO of German watchmaking company NOMOS Glashütte; the Baselworld press conference with speakers, from left to right, Jean-Daniel Pasche, President of the Watchmaking Federation, Jérôme Pernici, Marketing Director at Patek Philippe, Karl-Friedrich Scheufele co-CEO of Chopard, François Thiébaud, President of Tissot President, Eric Bertrand, President of the Baselworld Exhibitors' Committee and Sylvie Ritter, Managing Director of Baselworld; Yves Vulcan, Owner of Swisstime, the online hub for Swiss watchmaking





**THE BLOGGER: YVES  
VULCAN, SWISSTIME**

to design this year, as can be seen with the Autobahn. This new model may not appear to be typical for NOMOS Glashütte at first glance, and yet on closer inspection it wears the brand's signature in its design DNA. The watch combines contemporary product design and high-quality mechanics to create something exceptional, both in terms of technology and aesthetics.

**Apart from your own models, which new launches impressed you most?**

It's not a watch, but rather a trend: I was pleased to see that ladies' watches are getting larger and more mature, and that oversized men's watches – beyond a diameter of 44–45 mm – are becoming 'passé'. Overall, timepieces are becoming more elegant and slender again; this proves that we're making the right decisions with our watches and are ahead of the trend.

**Some brands didn't exhibit this year. What, in your mind, does this signify?**

Perhaps now, in the internet age, trade fairs aren't as important as they once were. Yet for us, Baselworld is still an important fixture in the calendar, even if the significance has changed.

**What is the appeal of mechanical watches in a digital world?**

At NOMOS Glashütte, we believe mechanical watches simply offer something different from smartwatches – our products draw on a long heritage of craftsmanship, giving customers an elegant timepiece that underlines their style and values, and will accompany them throughout their life.

In times of increasing digitisation, there's clearly also a countertrend – a desire to go offline, and a longing for mechanical, analogue products.

**What developments do you think you'll see in the luxury watch industry over the next five years?**

We can't predict the future, but we do think that the industry can expect a continuation of the latest trend – namely that established luxury brands react to the current economic situation by lowering the entry-level price for mechanical watches in the hope of appealing to a new generation of watch enthusiasts. We don't make watches for astronauts or yachting, but rather beautiful watches for everyday life. Customers and retailers are becoming ever more aware of our reputation, and we're delighted about it.

**What were the main trends at Baselworld 2018?**

Classic timepieces for men featured uncluttered dials and elegant cases, while new designs for complications and tourbillons were presented at the high-end of the market. Sport watches, and chronographs in particular, played a prominent role this year. There was also an increase in the number of steel watches enabling brands to produce models at more attractive prices than in previous years.

**What were the trends in the area of gemstones, watches and jewellery?**

Ladies' watches are in the spotlight for a good many Swiss brands, with complications and chronographs joining gemset models. Models in pink and white gold were particularly prominent.