

DEFINITION

In 2011 Cartier and Baume & Mercier are introducing new products that strengthen and redefine their identities in their fields. but what are the strategies of the company leaders? We asked Bernard Fornas and Alain Zimmerman.

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NEW COMPLICATIONS

CARTIER

In 2011, Cartier finally achieved what they were missing: Novel complications that give them a place on the horological A-list.

WORDS ADRIAN MURPHY

“WE ARE THE king of jewellers and the prince of watchmaking! We are the most creative brand in the industry. Nobody else is able to be everywhere like we are!”

Humble pie has never been part of Bernard Fornas’s diet. But why should it be? With the new products being introduced in 2011 there is no reason for Cartier’s CEO to be anything but proud.

We meet Fornas at Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie, the exclusive, invitation-only watch show at Geneva Palexpo. Bearing in mind that Cartier is renting thousands of square metres at the show, it’s surprising that the CEO’s interview room is only around 20 square metres.

In this far-from-glamorous, rather drab setting I can understand that an alpha male is not very interested in listening to a journalist’s questions for the umpteenth time. I understand why it’s more interesting to use my colleague, Mrs Hirsch, as a mannequin for creative high jewellery watches. I’d do the same.

Eventually Fornas gives me some attention and starts drawing a triangle that he divides into six squares: “The base symbolises entry-level watches, and the top is high jewellery and high complications. Until recently, Cartier was lacking here” – he points to the top-right square of the sketch, the part symbolising haute horology. “But now we have the Astromat with the calibre 9800 MC, so we have everything from entry level Tank Solo at 1,900 euros to the Astromat and fantastic high jewellery pieces. Now we have plenty of creativity in all parts of the pyramid!”

Indeed, the new gravity-compensating complication that allegedly gives more accuracy than a tourbillon was a showstopper at the SIHH. This and other horological inventions, like last year’s Astrotourbillon and the concept watch ID One from Cartier’s high horology team led by Carole Forestier, shows that the world’s second largest watch brand means business about becoming one of the world’s best manufacturers of high horology.

Another way of getting a place on the horological A-list is to remind people about your heritage. So at this year’s SIHH, Cartier organised a historical exhibition of watches and clocks to remind people that they have had a continuous history for more than a century.

“But, of course, it will take time to become a high horology brand in people’s minds. Even if we are innovative and deliver high quality and great design it takes time to build creativity. We’ll be patient.”

However, the brand that made the world’s first male wrist watch in 1904 is ambitious.

“Of course, we are moving fast. In a few years we’ll be one of the key players. We sell 500 tourbillons a year. That is more than Breguet, Jaeger, Patek and Blancpain. So, we are among the first in tourbillon sales.”

Some of these tourbillons are combined with high jewellery.

“We first make the jewellery then put time on it. Not like other brands that make a watch and fill it with pave diamonds. We never do this.”

Asked about Cartier’s next step, his answer is simple:

“Now we must be more creative than everybody.”

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NEW BRAND STRATEGY

BAUME & MERCIER

Baume & Mercier has a long history of fine watchmaking but when it comes to marketing they may not have been as precise as they would have liked. That's all set to change this year as the company unveils a new brand identity and new collections.

WORDS ADRIAN MURPHY

THIS YEAR SHOULD be a milestone for Baume & Mercier, as CEO Alain Zimmermann and his team reveal their new brand concept following a year of hard work to strengthen the watchmaker's identity.

The result involves a photo shoot in the Hamptons to present Baume & Mercier as a lifestyle choice with three new collections and a new slogan – “Life is about choice.”

“We talked about important dates, such as 1919 when we received the Geneva seal; we were the fifth company to get it,” he says. “We have been looking to our heritage. What we are saying is that there is no need to make a choice about leaving it behind but there has to be that balance between watchmaking and design.”

The company was founded in 1830 by brothers Louis Victor and Pierre-Joseph Célestin Baume. In 1918, Louis Victor's grandson, William Baume, and jeweller Paul Mercier established the current name.

Famous collections followed, with the Riviera, Linea, Hampton and Classima. However building a distinctive identity has been hard.

“Our aim has been to find the identity we are lacking,” says Zimmermann.

“The brand identity was not clear and we have different answers to the question we asked people. All respondents to market research agreed on time, quality and the pure, classical design. However, if you ask for more words about the brand – for example, is it related to couture or sport? – then they begin to struggle. That is why we embarked on a clear brand project to give more identity to the product.”

Baume & Mercier's secret over the years has been to create timepieces that are exquisite in design, technologically innovative and reasonably priced. Zimmermann says the price range is what sets Baume & Mercier apart. “We won't change that position. Our core price range is \$1,500–\$3,000 and this is where we want to be strong. We give more expertise without increasing the price.”

Zimmermann believes there are two markets, the classic and the sport, and Baume & Mercier has no plans to move into the sport arena and will instead come back to the watchmakers' traditional qualities.

“The models and designs we have are the DNA of the brand,” he says. “I would prefer we were strong in a smaller market than weak in many and there is no need for us to go where Rolex is. We would have to fight like hell to be successful.”

Four collections have been dropped and three new collections, inspired by Baume & Mercier's historical timepieces, will be launched. The successful Hampton and Classima lines are being kept. A new television campaign will be aired in March.

Every collection from now on will be inspired by a historical piece, and the new branding is already being rolled out on the website with a new catalogue, advertising campaign and public relations all becoming visible in the spring.

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