

THE YEAR AHEAD

The annual Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie (SIHH) is likely to showcase more women's novelties as luxury brands push even harder in this segment of the high-end watch market

BY CHUANG PECK MING



IWC SCHAFFHAUSEN DA VINCI
AUTOMATIC MOON PHASE 36

LOOKING for new buyers as sales fell, luxury watch brands launched more timepieces than usual for women in 2016. It is likely that in 2017 they will push even harder in this segment of the high-end watch market, which the Swiss have a near monopoly. Visitors to the week-long Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie (SIHH) in mid-January are likely to see more women's novelties showcased than last year at the annual watch fair, one of two giant fairs in Switzerland where most of the new watches coming into the market in the year are first unveiled.

Months before the event, nine of the 17 participating watch brands have already sent out previews of the novelties that they will be presenting. Four of them offered samples of only or mainly timepieces for ladies. One had a balanced mix of women and men's watches to show, while the rest of the brands had only men's pieces.

Though men's watches will still dominate the show at SIHH, more exhibition space has been given to women's timepieces lately. Certainly, the lady customer is becoming more prominent than before. After all, women make up a big share of the buyers in the watch market.

That is probably why IWC Schaffhausen has done something which would have been unthinkable only a few years back. The brand, which has been selling watches "engineered for men", shed its masculine image in Hong Kong in November to unveil a pre-SIHH selection that is tailored primary for women.

"With the new Da Vinci collection, we are consciously trying to anchor the brand in the minds of women, who account for a significant proportion of watch lovers," says Franziska Gsell, IWC's chief marketing officer.

Three models were presented in Hong Kong, with two of them for ladies: the Da Vinci Automatic 36 and the Da Vinci

Automatic Moon Phase 36. The former also comes in a unisex version with a larger case. The third model, the Da Vinci Perpetual Calendar Chronograph, is a complication watch for men.

The last time that IWC launched a new Da Vinci collection was some 10 years ago – and the watches then had unusual cases with a shape resembling a barrel in profile. The new timepieces bid farewell to this tonneau case and return to the familiar round one. They also sit more comfortably on the wrist, thanks to newly designed movable horns with curved lugs which ensure that the strap or bracelet fits snugly on it.

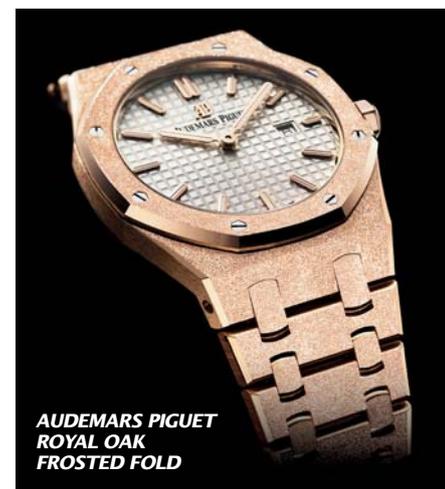
The two new Da Vinci women models are not just smaller and slimmer, they are also more feminine in design. The crown – which controls the winding and adjustment of the time – is rounded, and the dial of the timepieces has a recessed inner circle.

The models come in gold cases with diamond-set bezels and alligator leather straps in many colours. Engraved on their case-back is the "Flower of Life", a geometrical figure which has several regularly overlapping circles and was the object of intensive study and numerous drawings by Leonardo da Vinci.

Richard Mille, which boasts highly expensive timepieces marketed by mega movie and sports stars, presented two women novelties in its pre-SIHH sample: the RM 07-01 and RM 037.

The hallmark of the Richard Mille men's collection is NTPPT carbon, which lends its watches "a unique and powerful appearance while simultaneously ensuring an optimal protection for the calibre". This hard material, now set with gems, is also used to make the two new feminine watches.

Audemars Piguet also appears to focus only on women in 2017, after spending the past two years showing off a new super minute repeater. For a taste of what it has in store at SIHH, the brand famous for its octagonal-cased Royal



AUDEMARS PIGUET
ROYAL OAK
FROSTED FOLD



RICHARD MILLE RM07-01



PIAGET
ALTIPLANO

Oak timepieces offered the New Royal Oak Frosted Gold in Florence collection, which marks the 40th anniversary of its women Royal Oak line.

The defining feature of the Frosted Gold timepieces – in rhodium or silver-toned dial and in 33 or 37 mm case – lies in their “shimmering sparkle, which comes from a surface treatment process rooted in an ancient gold hammering technique, also called the Florentine technique”.

Jaeger-LeCoultre, which in 2016 gave the floor to its Reverso line – a line more popular with women than with men – is keeping the spotlight on the ladies in 2017 by presenting a new Rendez-Vous feminine collection. Apart from offering yellow and rose gold options

as well as a bigger case and new straps, this collection, which made its debut in 2012, introduced a moon phase – the Rendez-Vous Moon – and a new chiming reminder function. The latter, featured in the Rendez-Vous Sonatina Large, chimes at the appointed time. “The delicate tinkle of a single hammer strike is audible at the selected time,” Jaeger-LeCoultre says.

Roger Dubuis is falling back on colours to draw the crowd. It dedicated 2016 exclusively to ladies with the brand’s Velvet line. This year, the focus is on a new Excalibur collection and Roger Dubuis is letting men’s timepieces return to the

centre stage – though there is also a new women’s model, the Excalibur 36, among its pre-SIHH novelties.

Two new men’s models were offered for the sneak peek: the Excalibur Quatuor Cobalt MicroMelt and the Excalibur Spider Skeleton Automatic. As its name suggests, the Quatuor Cobalt MicroMelt is made of the high-performance cobalt chrome alloy, produced using “the very exclusive MicroMelt technology that represents just 0.1 per cent of worldwide metallurgy”.

But what really stands out are the colours of the watch: the gleaming cobalt chrome material is contrasted with colourful parts in PVD-coated blue and dynamic red and white, including a blue alligator leather strap with red stitching. Cool colour contrasts are also the keynote of the Spider Skeleton.

Piaget, which is celebrating

ROGER DUBUIS
EXCALIBUR
SPIDER SKELETON
AUTOMATIC



the 60th anniversary of its signature Altiplano line of ultra-thin timepieces, unveiled in its pre-SIHH presentation two original models – one hand-winding and the other self-winding – which are “inspired by the aesthetic codes of the first ultra-thin watches”.

The first model, sporting a smaller 38 mm case, is intended to be a unisex timepiece. The second has a bigger 43 mm case. These are only the first of the new models in the 60th Anniversary Collection in a limited edition. Piaget says that it will reveal the rest in the course of the year.

Officine Panerai’s pre-SIHH teasers – two editions of the new Radiomir 3 Days Acciaio – are also inspired by a past model, a rare Radiomir watch produced in the 1930s which has a 12-sided bezel with the words “Officine Panerai Brevettato”. The inscription refers to the patented luminous substance used on the dial.

Both the new editions – totally masculine with the brand still sticking to that image – have the same 12-sided bezel and engraving, but the colours of their dials differ. One is black, the colour of the vintage model. The other is shaded brown – a totally new colour in the Panera collections.

Vacheron Constantin also offered two more complicated novelties for preview. One is the Traditionnelle Minute Repeater Tourbillon, which reflects “the technical and aesthetic sophistication pervading every Vacheron Constantin model”. It is equipped with a new movement made in-house.

The other new watch is the Patrimony Moon Phase and Retrograde Date, which features a dial where the cycle and age of the moon – the number of days which have elapsed since the last new moon – are reproduced on a display requiring no corrections for 122 years.

Ulysses Nardin’s two new pre-SIHH models are a showcase of the brand’s expertise in the fine art of enamelling, miniature painting and use of Jaquemarts. The first, the Classico Manufacture, displays a stunning blue Grand Feu enamel dial. Only a handful of craftsmen have the

necessary skills to master the Grand Feu technique, first used in the 17th century.

The second new watch, the Hourstriker Pin-Up, has miniature painting on the dial and Jaquemarts to highlight the hour striker function, one of the most intricate complications in mechanical timekeeping. ■



VACHERON CONSTANTIN
TRADITIONNELLE MINUTE
REPEATER TOURBILLON



JAEGER-
LECOULTRE
RENDEZ-
VOUS MOON



OFFICINE PANERAI
RADIOMIR 3 DAYS ACCIAIO



ULYSSE NARDIN
HOURSTRIKER
PIN-UP