

Belles Montres Shanghai

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Following on the success of Belles Montres in Paris, the organisers opened the first Belles Montres in Shanghai, China from October 26 - 30. Designed to help brands raise exposure in the Middle Kingdom by attracting a mixture of end customers, local and national press and retail partners, Belles Montres Shanghai was an intriguing experiment that most brands thought was worth the effort, and worth continuing. Held at the Shanghai Exhibition Centre, Belles Montres Shanghai had the feeling of an industry trade show, like a mini-Basel and SIHH, but it was open to the public. Brands relished the opportunity to take their message, and their products, directly to the end consumer, something that has been rarely done but also something that smaller brands are trying to do more and more.

At the end of the four days in Shanghai, most people thought that Belles Montres Shanghai was a qualified success. Though traffic was not what was expected, there were still many quality contacts, with collectors, distributors, retailers and journalists.

For many brands, it was the first exposure to China, an opportunity to feel first-hand the energy of the country and to see the retail miracle that is modern day China.

The plan is to hold a Belles Montres Shanghai next year, each year improving the presentation and the attendance.

Here's what some of the exhibiting brands had to say about Belles Montres Shanghai:

Guillaume Tetu, Hautlence:

For the niche market brands, this kind of exhibition is really new. For us, this is a good mo-

ment for the Chinese market. You have a lot of Chinese who know a lot about watches, they have many established brands, and they are looking for something unique. You also have the second generation of watch buyers, who don't want their father's watches.

We need to educate the customer. We are not a destination brand and we need good partners who want to build these niche/alternative brands.

Everyone is coming to the Chinese market, so we have to find alternative ways to distribute. We have to do events, collector dinners and general watch education to share the experience of the brand and the passion we have for it. We are building a brand but we are not a brand yet.

We have done four years with Belles Montres in Paris, and we were one of the first ones to work on developing contact with the end customers. Shanghai was really great, in that the public could touch the watches and talk directly with us, so for us it was a good opportunity.

If I am sharing my passion with someone who only can afford a Swatch, I am still sharing the dream. If he becomes rich, he will buy our watches. We welcome everyone who wants to take a look at our watches.

After the four days in Shanghai, I am more convinced than ever that we need to work with someone who speaks Chinese and who truly understands the Swiss watch industry and the Chinese culture, someone who can help advise on entering the market, and at the same time help explain the brand to the Chinese customer.

Martin Pauli, Angular Momentum:

For everyone, China is an emerging market. I lost some markets in the last few years, so I need to open China. Customers here have an affinity with my products, with the hand craftsmanship and the unique pieces. They love the fact that it's all handcrafted and completely custom. It's exactly the right time for smaller brands.



CHINESE EMPEROR by Angular Momentum

Consumption has been going on for a few years now, so customers have already purchased their Rolexes and Omegas and they want something different. And the richest people are really something different.

I work directly with the end customers. The good part of bespoke is that you never have price problems because there is no way customers can compare or shop prices. You are in complete control.

Olivier Müller, Laurent Ferrier:

Belles Montres was a good opportunity to meet with the end customer. It's always interesting to see what the customers know about the brand. You can see the reaction of the customers, unfiltered. I think we will have two collectors who will buy as a result of this show. The Chinese luxury customer right now buys for the brand, not for the product. He has to feel like he is investing, not buying.

Pascal Brandt, Bulgari:

It is very important for a high-end brand to have an exhibition here. China is a sophisticated market, which has a very long relationship with time measurement culture and history. For that, we speak to people who are quite sensitive to these kind of products.

We are in China, we have boutiques in the main cities in China—China is a huge country. Southern China, especially the coast from Shanghai to Hong Kong, is quite developed in



GALET SECRET by Laurent Ferrier



CENTENUS by Heritage



LEDIX VÉLOCE by Celsius

our brand awareness. Globally speaking, Bulgari is an international brand active in jewellery, perfume, accessories and watches, so there are several entries into our universe. Many Chinese travel to Europe and Western countries, so they have already discovered the brand. We saw many customers and had many press meetings as well, and persons active in watch distribution.

Alain Silberstein:

This year I am happy to introduce a Chinese collection. It's quite challenging to put your know-how and expertise to a culture other than yours. I have a Chinese lady who helps me to understand the Chinese culture, and break the barrier of understanding. This is my 25th year in watchmaking, so I am making a test here.

The response has been good from the Chinese so far. They love my style. One of the main reasons I came here is to discover the difference between mainland China and Hong Kong. Asia has been my first market since the very beginning. I will do some homework, I collected many magazines from China and Hong Kong and I will hopefully understand better the difference between China and Hong Kong. It's important for me. I need to understand people. In Shanghai, you have some incredible malls. I came to Shanghai 20 years ago with the first exhibition of the Swiss Watchmaking Federation, and the changes have been remarkable. There are 30 million people in Shanghai with 130,000 millionaires.

In Asia, the spirit is good and business is good. There is demand here and if we are able to provide the best of our creativity and innovation, we can succeed, but this is a demanding country.

Pierre Jacques, DeBethune:

Our plan was to approach the market to showcase the brand a bit, to show that we exist. We don't have a huge expectation in China, since we are such a small brand, producing only 250–350 pieces a year. It's good to market to China, because Chinese people are buying all around the world. If you are unknown here, you can miss out on these sales.

About half of the people who came to Belles Montres knew our brand, while others were surprised that they didn't know.

If you don't have people who speak the language here, it's really tough.

If I can find a good retailer here, we would love to work with them, but we don't expect much. It's not possible to sell a lot of watches because we don't have a lot of production.

I think this is the right time for us to come to China. We are an independent brand, it's a good time for us to enter the market. Before, the Chinese buyers wanted to wear the famous name watches, but now they are ready to wear different, unique brands. It's the perfect timing.

Christian Gütermann, Heritage:

Our Centenus line was developed for the Chinese way of telling time, with a regular display

and a special display based on China's old system of telling time, which broke the day up into 100 equal segments. This can also be adapted for the Japanese.

We developed the watch and wanted to show it here, directly to the end customers to get their feedback. I'm surprised at how many people have come to the exhibition. I know now that we need a local partner.

Edouard Meylan, Celsius:

As a relatively new brand, based in France, Belles Montres Shanghai was the perfect place to launch our newest product. We don't want to be seen as a gadget, but rather as the ultimate pocket watch.

The people who came to Belles Montres were really wowed by the product and there has been a lot of real interest. We put these people in contact with our retailers in Hong Kong and Singapore. We plan to have retailers in China next year, with our next generation of product.

China has been the saving grace for so many major brands in this challenging economic world, and it is shaping up to be a key market for the independents as well. Belles Montres Shanghai was the first step for many of the brands exhibiting to make contact with the Chinese market, learn more about it and the wants and needs of the end consumer, and to see how to proceed from here. <