



Dealing in Doha

The Doha Jewellery and Watches Exhibition

› **Keith W. Strandberg**

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The Doha Jewellery and Watches Exhibition is nothing like any of the shows I have ever been to. It is the first and only show that is solely for consumers, designed to showcase the best retailers and the best brands, resulting in impressive watch and jewellery sales. Instead of brands having individual booths, the retailers have their own huge spaces inside the 15,000 square metre Doha Exhibition Centre.

A brief history

This is the ninth year of the show, now sponsored by Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA). The idea is to promote Qatar as a tourist destination, while at the same time sell high-end watches and jewellery.

A \$600,000 Rolex watch and a \$2.2 million necklace sold on the first day of the show,

at the same booth. More than 300 international and local exhibitors attended, with the total amount on display topping one billion US dollars.

"The exhibition has made a name in the market and we are becoming the leading show in the region," QTA Chairman Mr. Ahmed Al Nuaimi says. "Our show differs from everything else because of the way it is branded – we target luxury and the big brands and don't allow the little brands here. We focus on brand names and as a result, the brands have trust in our exhibition."

Some of the key Qatari exhibitors included Ali Bin Ali Watches & Jewellery, Fifty One East, Amiri Gems, Alfardan Jewellery, Blue Salon, Al Majed Jewellery, Al Muftah Jewellery, Makki Jewellery, Marzook Al Shamlan, Paris Gallery and Al-Zain. In addition, high-profile international brands featured in the show included, among others, Audemars Piguet, Backes & Strauss, Cartier, Century, Chanel, Chopard, Franc Vila, Hautlence, Jaeger-LeCoultre, Maurice Lacroix, Montblanc, Patek Philippe, Piaget, Ralph Lauren, Richard Mille, Ritmo Mundo,

Vacheron Constantin, Van Cleef & Arpels and Zenith.

"You have to use this show as part of your overall presence in the region," says Vartkess A. Knadjian, Group CEO, Backes & Strauss. "We don't just come here to sell, we are here supporting our partner as well. Qatar and the Middle East is a very important market. The customers like high-value items, they are very discerning and knowledgeable."

The palaces

Qatar is governed by the Emir, who lives in his palace with his wife. In addition, the key ministers and officials also live in palaces. These palaces come to the show to buy individual watches, but the more important purchases are for gifts.

"Gift giving is a tradition in the Middle East," says Ali Soltani, president of Ritmo Mundo, Drops and Reflex. "When a head of state comes to Qatar, for example, it is tradition to give a very nice gift, as hospitality is very important. There are different ministries – the Palace (the Emir and his wife), the Prime Minister, the





Foreign Minister and other palaces and they all have to buy gifts, which they do at this show. The brands exhibiting in Doha call this gift buying "corporate" business, but it's really for the palaces. "There is the Emir himself, who buys for his personal use and the palace buys for gifts," details Backes & Strauss's Knadjian. "The 'Corporate' business is really ministries who buy from the show to support the effort. It's always been like this. The extravagant gift giving has been going on for centuries. They make you feel like an honoured guest."

The Qatar market

Qatar is becoming a centre for luxury goods, and especially for watches, with a very educated customer base, along with travellers from all over the world.

"The men here are knowledgeable about the movements and the craftsmanship of aesthetical products," says Alain Riguidel, brand director for the Middle East for Piaget. "There are more and more collectors. The women who are looking more about the aesthetics are becoming more knowledgeable about the products. They are looking for something that has a long-term recognition and they come to brands that have a history. We have

tradition and we respect the tradition. We are very creative."

Vacheron Constantin did a special world time with Doha on the dial, just for the Qatar market, and a world time with a unique burgundy hand, ordered by the palace. "Every part of the world is important for Vacheron, but the Middle East is an important region because it is very active, it's booming in terms of watchmaking maturity, retail is really growing and tourism is really coming massively here," says Yassin Tag, brand manager for the Middle East and Indian Sub-Continent for Vacheron Constantin. In the past, more traditional and ornate jewellery and watches were the most popular, but that is changing, according to Andrea Hansen, president, Ivanka Trump. "The show has been fabulous for us," she says. "The younger generation of Qatari women have come out – they aren't just looking for the ornate pieces. In the first year I showed here, 2009, everything sold was like a museum piece and then Ivanka Trump did very well. I think it's good to be different here. The Palace loves Ivanka, they have been very supportive of the brand." Showing in Doha is important for the visibility of any brand that wants to be successful in Qatar and the Middle East. "It's important to

stay active and present in the market here," says Caroline Scheufele of Chopard. "All the leading brands are present. Qatar is an old market for us in the Middle East, we have a lot of Chopard fans. It's important that the clients see you year after year and they see the continuity of the products."

Mouawad had incredible jewellery pieces on display, and unlike other shows, where these pieces would serve as talking pieces, the chances of them selling here were very high indeed.

"We like this show very much," says Fred Mouawad, co-guardian, Mouawad, who had on display a US\$6.8 million Snow White Princess Diamond women's watch. "It's a way to display our masterpieces. The clients we see here in Qatar have a great affinity for rare gems, they are sophisticated, knowledgeable and they appreciate it."

For luxury watch brands, the Qatar Watch and Jewellery Show is a great opportunity to enter a strong and still growing market, showcase their best products and make lucrative sales. And if the palaces come and buy, so much the better. <

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