



all wound up

A German watchmaker cranks ahead of the Swiss with handmade watches that have endured history's most grueling tests.

Nobody would blame Walter Lange for feeling a slight bit angry about all he's had to go through. After all, on May 8, 1945, the last day of World War II, Russian fighter-bombers dropped their payloads on his hometown of Glashütte, about 250 kilometers south of Berlin, in an attempt to hit a retreating German Panzer division. The bombs blew up the town's industrial center, including the main watchmaking facility of his family's business, **A. Lange & Söhne**, which specialized in technical marine chronometers and high-end pocket watches with three quarter plates, proprietary Glashütte lever escapements, and high complications.

Then, in March 1946, even though the Lange family had never been affiliated with the Nazi Party and had done nothing more than make watches during the war, the factory and all the Langes' possessions were seized via Denazification Order 124. The decree against them was luckily overturned within a month, but the worst was yet to come. Two years later, the new regional authority seized the factory and all its assets, meaning the business the Lange family had started in 1845 was now in the hands of the East German government.

At the time, Walter Lange was working in the company repair shop, but once new management assumed control, he refused to kowtow—and was sentenced to toil in a uranium mine. Lange managed to flee and settle in Pforzheim, West Germany, another center of German watchmaking, where he went to work in distribution and assumed he'd never see his ancestral home again.

Amazingly, after all that conflict, Lange is actually *thankful* to the East German government for unwittingly doing a good thing: not destroying the A. Lange & Söhne name. Post-commie-takeover, the company was eventually merged with several other area institutions to form Glashütter Uhrenbetriebe (GUB), which began producing inexpensive watches during the 1970s and '80s quartz revolution. "By then, the name was no longer used and, fortunately, never misused, for which I shall re-main eternally grateful to the GUB," Lange, now 83, says.

More incredible still has been the rebirth of A. Lange & Söhne (alange-soehne.com). When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Lange secured financial backing, went back to Glashütte, found a core group of watchmakers (who still had boxes of vintage Lange movements and parts), and—145 years to the day after his great-grandfather Ferdinand Adolph Lange launched the brand—resurrected it. He then

bought back the original headquarters, where the company is once again based.

Page of 3 > >|

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