

THERE'S A SPECIAL PLACE FOR WATCHES IN
THE RALPH LAUREN UNIVERSE

UNIVERSALLY APPROPRIATE

BY KEITH W. STRANDBERG

I have a confession to make. When Ralph Lauren brought out its watch collection, I didn't understand how the high-end timepieces fit into the Ralph Lauren universe. My image of Ralph Lauren was limited primarily to polo shirts and fragrances. But, from the moment I walked into the brand's Saint-Germain boutique in Paris, I understood. My eyes were opened to the breadth and scope of the world of Ralph Lauren, and, in that context, the watch collection made perfect sense.



Ralph Lauren Sporting with elm burl dial

“WE WERE WORKING ON THE SLIM CLASSIQUE WAY BEFORE THE CRISIS, **LONG BEFORE THE TREND OF SLIM AND CLASSIC STYLING** GAINED MOMENTUM.”

—GUY CHATILLON, CEO OF THE RALPH LAUREN WATCH AND JEWELRY COMPANY



AMERICAN SUCCESS

Ralph Lauren, the man, has an incredible success story. He started out by selling ties and then sold the world on his vision of what people should be wearing. Lauren has transformed his success into an empire that covers everything from simple polo shirts to made-to-measure suits and couture clothing and, now, high-end mechanical watches and fine jewelry. Many companies make the claim that they have something for everyone, but Ralph Lauren is one that makes good on that promise.

WATCH CONNECTION

The story of the relationship between Lauren and Johann Rupert, chairman of the Richemont luxury group, is legendary by now. The two titans of industry struck up a friendship and decided to work together. The result is an arrangement in which a

globally recognized name from the fashion world enjoys access to the movement makers of the Richemont Group’s famed watch brands, names such as Piaget, IWC and Jaeger-LeCoultre. The team of expert watch professionals who work directly with Lauren to translate his creations into watches forms the Ralph Lauren Watch and Jewelry Company.

“I came from the watch industry, with a marketing perspective. Ralph and his team are coming from a completely different creative process,” says Guy Chatillon, CEO of the Ralph Lauren Watch and Jewelry Company. “The partnership combines the strength of both partners, and we work together closely to come up with products that keep the brand aesthetic and are in line with industry codes. Ralph is a visionary. Take as an example the Slim Classique—we were working on it long before the crisis,



SPORTING STYLE

The 2011 Sporting watch with elm burl dial is the first timepiece inspired by Ralph Lauren’s personal car collection. Its dial recalls the refined interior of his 1938 Bugatti Type 57SC Atlantic Coupe, particularly its wooden dashboard. The watch’s manual-winding Caliber RL98295, made by IWC for Ralph Lauren, is decorated with Côtes de Genève and perlage.



Slim Classique with diamonds



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Left: Stirrup chronograph, below:
Diamond Link Stirrup



long before the trend of slim and classic styling gained momentum.”

“Ralph is involved at every step along the way, in every single detail of the watch,” Chatillon continues. “He knows what he wants, yet he is very open. We can always present different options and ideas. He knows his customer, and he is a watch collector as well, so he has a sense of what a watch enthusiast is looking for.” Chatillon noted the designer’s sensibilities as they were working on the straps for the collection. “Ralph and his team asked me to come up with many different strap options; he wanted different, very specific colors and textures,” Chatillon remembers. “They pushed for their ideal, and we had to find ways to make it happen. And,

at the end, one plus one made three: we really came up with something qualitative and unique.”

BUILDING CREDIBILITY

When Ralph Lauren watches were introduced in 2009, they formed three collections: Stirrup, Slim Classique and Sporting, all quite classical in their styling. Attention to detail reigned throughout, along with the use of the best quality in movements, design and finishing. In the months since the initial launch, there have been few additions, and those have been extensions of the original collections. Chatillon explains, “When you are a newcomer, you need to build credibility. In the past, brands created bubbles with new products. Now, you will see less

newness and more consistency, more building up, more long-term products. Our objective was to come strongly with three collections. This doesn’t mean that we aren’t going to be working on new products, but, for the time being, it’s line extensions, not new collections.”

Ralph Lauren watches certainly combine iconic styling and great Swiss manufacture movements, and, with their traditional looks and high quality, they seem perfectly positioned for the times. “Timelessness and classic elegance are not trends,” Chatillon adds. “These values have always been appreciated, and I am convinced that they will continue to appeal to customers seeking products created to last and be relevant in the years to come.”



FAMILY RESEMBLANCE

This year, Ralph Lauren is introducing a jewelry collection that will take pride of place alongside the brand’s watch collection. “There are similarities of authenticity, legitimacy, design and quality between the watches and the jewelry,” says Chatillon. “We started designing a year ago. In record time, we debuted the collection.”

“There are five product families, all inspired by the environment of Ralph Lauren [equestrian, romantic, monogram, etc.],” he continues. “We are firmly in the world of fine jewelry, using incredible craftsmanship, precious metals, quality diamonds and more, and the styling is definitely in line with what the Ralph Lauren customer expects.”

A WORLD APART

Customers have indeed come to expect something particular from Ralph Lauren—a complete luxury lifestyle world, the brand’s signature. It is a world that is created through meticulous attention to detail, craftsmanship, authenticity and consistency in everything from product design to packaging to store design, merchandising and customer service.

Visiting Ralph Lauren’s Saint-Germain boutique in Paris when it opened, I was overwhelmed by the breadth of the Ralph Lauren collection. I discovered Ralph Lauren Purple Label (hand-cut, made-to-measure clothing), Ralph Lauren Black Label, Ralph Lauren Home, the Ralph Lauren restaurant (serving beef raised at Lauren’s ranch in Colorado) and much more. In particular, I was impressed by the attention to detail in the design of the boutique itself, which reflects an American aesthetic but with a nod to Parisian culture.

Now Ralph Lauren’s New York flagship store has expanded to include a Watch and Jewelry Salon. Just as Richemont brings watchmaking expertise and credibility to its partnership with Ralph Lauren, Ralph Lauren brings iconic design and comprehensive retail expertise. It all comes together in the salon, where visitors find a distinctive collection of timepieces presented within a unique lifestyle environment.

Whether in clothing, furnishings, jewelry or watches, what Ralph Lauren does certainly seems to be working. I, for one, can’t wait to see what’s next and what future expansions of the Ralph Lauren universe will bring. 877.639.7934, ralphlaurenwatches.com



BOUTIQUE CULTURE

Ralph Lauren Watch and Jewelry Company opened its first US Watch and Jewelry Salon, inside its Madison Avenue flagship boutique in New York City last fall. The salon comprises a series of lavishly decorated spaces spanning nearly 600 square feet. Finished with details such as paneled walls, inset mirrors, limestone floors, damask drapes and camel carpeting and furnished with antique desks, pedestal vitrines, a monumental wrought-iron centerpiece showcase and a crystal chandelier, the salon is a luxurious setting for the presentation of Ralph Lauren timepieces and jewelry. Find it at 888 Madison Ave.