

The Experience of Four Generations

An Interview with Kim-Eva Wempe,
Chief Executive Officer, Gerhard D. Wempe KG

EDITORS' NOTE Born in Hamburg, Germany, Kim-Eva Wempe lived in Switzerland and Italy and held internships in watch, jewelry, and gemstone production. In 1984, she began working at Gerhard D. Wempe KG and that same year, began a business management program at the Wirtschaftsakademie Hamburg (business college). She graduated in 1987 and became a partner responsible for procurement/planning, human resources, marketing, and public relations. In 2000, she developed the new jewelry brand line, BY KIM. She has been a personally liable partner of Gerhard D. Wempe KG since 1994. In 2003, she took over business operations. She received the title of "Hamburg Entrepreneur of 2007" from the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Selbständiger Unternehmer - ASU (Association of Independent Entrepreneurs) and the Bundesverband Junger Unternehmer - BJU (National Association of Young Entrepreneurs).



Kim-Eva Wempe

COMPANY BRIEF Founded in 1878 and headquartered in Hamburg, Germany, Wempe Jewelers (www.wempe.com, www.wempe-glashuette.com) is a purveyor of the finest luxury timepieces and jewelry. With 29 stores in major capitals throughout Europe including Germany, New York, and now Beijing, Wempe is considered to be one of the top five jewelers worldwide. Seven hundred employees live the company's unique philosophy and are carrying the family torch in its fourth generation. The launch of their own jewelry line, BY Kim, has highlighted the brand's ability to create its very own identity with a focus on quality and long lasting designs. Wempe's watch line, manufactured in Glashuette, Germany, has received numerous awards and is no less successful. The Observatory, in which the watches are being produced and where 16 apprentices acquire the skills to become certified watchmakers, also houses a chronometer testing facility, the only one of its kind in Germany. While the main pillar of the business is in Europe, the flagships of the operation are found in New York located on the ground floor of the Peninsula Hotel on Fifth Avenue and 55th Street and a stand-alone Rolex Boutique on the ground floor of the Rolex Building on Fifth Avenue at 53rd Street, making Wempe the only jeweler to own and operate two successful stores on the world's most famous avenue.

Wempe is a brand with a long history and heritage. Would you highlight the history of Wempe and how the brand has evolved over the years?

Wempe has been marked by its four generations: The founder Gerhard D. Wempe was a watchmaker. He had entrepreneurial ambitions, opened his own workshop in 1878, and ended up with five branches in Hamburg. His son Herbert further developed the business, incorporating also a firm of maritime chronometers. The grandson

Hellmut set the international expansion in motion and, under my guidance as the great-granddaughter, Wempe's own watch and jewelry brands were launched.

Wempe is a consistent industry leader. What makes the brand so special and how have you achieved such consistently strong results?

The company founder's principle was, "I shall endeavor to offer my honored customers the best goods, the most extensive selection, and the most generous service."



Rings BY KIM

We have assembled the experience of four generations today and we always follow this guideline.

What are the key markets for Wempe and would you highlight the global footprint for the brand?

Our key markets are Europe and the U.S. We started in a provincial town in Northern Germany, went to Hamburg, and expanded throughout Germany. In 1980, Wempe made the leap to New York, followed by the European cosmopolitan cities Paris, London, Vienna, Madrid, and the latest opening last year, which was Beijing, China.

Wempe is well-known for its watch offerings, but you are also a leader in jewelry. What role does jewelry play for the business?

Jewelry plays a crucial role. It is "made in Germany," in our own atelier in the South of Germany. We have our own designer and our lines are influenced by Italian and French design. "BY KIM" has become the third strongest brand for Wempe.

Would you provide an overview of your jewelry and the vision behind each of the collections?

BY KIM is an international brand with lines = "Helioro" and "Blu" as brand icons. The jewelry not only looks good, but feels good.

Diamonds are a girl's best friend. This is why we have a large diamond collection and quite a good sense for creations that women might wish for.

How do you define the target market for your jewelry and is this a broader market for Wempe than for its watch offerings?

Watches are for men and women and therefore represent the broader market for us; jewelry is only worn by women. Wempe has become the first address for watch enthusiasts. We only concentrate on brands with a watchmaking tradition. As for jewelry, we target women who consider a piece of jewelry not as a fashion item but as a valuable part of their personalities. This is why the "feel good factor" of our jewelry is much appreciated.

Wempe is known for its focus on service. How critical is customer service to your success and how are you able to ensure such consistent service standards worldwide?

Customer service is essential for us. We maintain the standard by conviction and constant training.

Are there specific pieces within your jewelry collections that you wear the most and to which you have a special attachment?

My Helioro ring that replaced my wedding ring (although I still have the same husband), the diamond line from my mother, my diamond solitaire studs and, variably, a piece with colored stones.

What are your key priorities for the business as you look to the future?

To make the right decisions in order to lead the company into the fifth generation. ●