



An Iconic Brand



An Interview with
Gianfranco D'Attis, President-North America, IWC

EDITORS' NOTE Gianfranco D'Attis has held his current position since 2011. He grew up in Schaffhausen and his first job was as an intern for IWC in trade marketing. Most recently, he was head of IWC operations in the Middle East, based in Dubai.

COMPANY BRIEF Founded in 1868 in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, by a Boston watchmaker, Florentine Ariosto Jones, IWC (International Watch Co.) produces handcrafted, luxury timepieces. With nearly 500 employees in Switzerland and around the world, IWC (www.iwc.com) has been owned by Geneva-headquartered Compagnie Financière Richemont SA since 2000.



Gianfranco D'Attis

What makes the IWC brand so special?

We have an incredible story. IWC was founded in 1868 by an American entrepreneur and this fundamental aspect has led to beautiful results. It's important for every collector in America that the brand was founded by this incredible individual from Boston who went to Switzerland to create a modern, innovative manufacture. He built this manufacture at the Rhine River to use the power of the river to generate the electricity. So he was not only a smart watchmaker; he was a good businessman as well.

This industrialization mentality is still part of our DNA, and part of IWC's original vision. It remains part of our culture today: to be entrepreneurial, very driven, and very passionate backed by a strong tradition.

How is that history reflected in the collections?

We have a very strong iconic collection that has not changed. Even when we want to create new product, we always begin with our basic ideas from history and try to re-innovate them with a modern interpretation.

This is part of the success and credibility that our collectors appreciate about our brand – that we don't just launch a new product but that we are creating something based on our heritage. We just interpreted it in a more modern way.

What is the profile of an IWC customer?

An IWC collector is a man who has a strong taste and interest in culture, innovation, and engineering, and who is passionate and driven by the beauty of our watchmaking.

Is the offering consistent globally or is it tailored for each location?

We're an international brand so we offer an international collection. We don't tailor the collections based on the cultural base or differentiate the brand collection in different zones of the world. It's what makes the brand so successful globally.

You recently opened a flagship boutique on Madison Avenue. Are you happy with how it has been received?

The retail strategy in the U.S. and the world has repositioned the brand as high-end luxury. Why are we doing that? More exposure. Also, clearly we are trying to offer our consumers an experience that they can't get in a more traditional environment. We're upgrading the service, engaging the customer, and communicating the DNA of the brand in a different way.

Our customers can sit in our Pilot's lounge – when they see the DNA of the pilot and enjoy our flight simulator. They are happy to engage with the brand. It is something we wanted to create in our brand environment and we are proud of this.

Will you push for more boutiques in North America or are you content with your existing distribution?

The boutique is a marketing tool to communicate the brand in a qualitative way, but we're still strongly driven by wholesale. If an opportunity arises to open a nice boutique where we can reposition ourselves in a more qualitative way in a key market, we would be interested.

In settings where salespeople are selling across brands, how do you train them on what differentiates IWC?

There are a lot of other brands with great stories to tell that we respect. We just have to make certain that the sales associates will present the beauty of IWC and that they know our story. With so many beautiful stories around our timepieces as is the case with the Pilot's and Aquatimer collections, if a sales associate can transmit this emotional story to our end customer, he engages the customer and it's an easy sell.

What new launches do you have planned for the brand?

Every year, IWC's strategy is to create a new story and to try to innovate on one line. This year, it was the Ingenieur line. We have a partnership with Mercedes-Benz Petronas AMG Formula One team, where we're trying

to communicate the story of engineering by using new materials, their technological idea, and the aspect of speed in auto racing, which has a certain affinity to our industry.

IWC handcrafts its products, but is technology changing production?

Craftsmanship is driven by technology, especially with IWC. We are constantly trying to be up to speed with the latest innovations, because that is in our DNA. We want to be leaders in technology, innovation, and engineering, and we are obliged to our customers to work on movements.

It's a beautiful mix between the technological innovation and the marketing innovation. If you can mix both concepts together, you create a very strong, impactful brand concept.

Has the luxury market come back from the global economic downturn?

It hasn't come back, but the good brands will always perform well. Strong brands will always remain so and that will not change. As we have a strong brand concept, credibility, and tradition, we continue to be a strong brand.

We are a long-standing marketing creation and have been consistently working on our image, our tradition, our movements, our engineering, and on our marketing concepts, and we are consistently growing in a positive direction.

What type of focus does IWC put on after-sales support?

One of the reasons we are strong in retail is because we provide our customers with the best service they can get after-sale. We also focus on our customer service experience and providing the best knowledge about our product – this is where we invest. Our customers expect to be treated professionally and exclusively.

What are the benefits and value to being owned by a group like Richemont?

As part of the biggest luxury group in the world, you can leverage on several points from distribution and marketing to production, management, professionalism, development, and management – we share a lot of information and this creates a lot of value to help us remain strong in the market.

How do you focus your time?

There is never enough. But if you want to develop an iconic brand, you better make the time to do it right – otherwise, somebody else will. ●

IWC Ingenieur Automatic Carbon Performance (top left);
IWC Portuguese Chronograph (top right)