



Storytelling in Watchmaking

An Interview with Andrew L. Waldan,
President and Owner, Waldan International



Waldan's NOS Valjoux 7751 automatic winding movement – 25 jewels, 28,800 vph/4Hz, 42H power reserve (left); Ref. 0195RG with 18K solid rose gold bracelet (above left); and Ref. 3986R-2 (above right)

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to his current post, Andrew Waldan was a Development Officer for Waldan International. Before this, he was a member with RMG and an apprentice for Wempe and Waldan International. He received his B.B.A. in International Business from Lynn University.



Andrew L. Waldan

COMPANY BRIEF Waldan International (waldanwatches.com) is a private, family-owned, American watch brand based out of New York.

The company was established in 1979, by Oscar Waldan, a Polish watchmaker who learned about the art of watchmaking in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp during WWII, and is now run by the second generation, his son Andrew. For over 37 years, Waldan Watches have sold through Tiffany & Co., Tourneau, Neiman Marcus, Asprey, and Wempe and are known for their exquisite craftsmanship, high attention to detail, and affordability. In addition to crafting meticulous luxury timepieces, Waldan prides itself on providing top-tier client service to their "cult" following of collectors and enthusiasts.

Will you talk about the history of Waldan as a brand and how it has evolved?

My father started off working for Tissot in 1953. He had such a knack for design and understanding wristwatches because of the knowledge he gained while a teenager that, by 1956, he ended up as one of their lead designers. One of his designs ended up being a big pioneering moment for Tissot – he created a first world-time chronometer for them with another watchmaker.

He then took his talents to Universal Genève, where he stayed for a time as the Vice President of Merchandising and Styling, and this allowed him to meet many more influential people. Through these relationships, he met two powerful people in the industry at the time. He was able to further study with them, solidifying his love for mechanical movements and mechanical chronographs, as well as the vintage aesthetic.

As the industry developed, quartz was introduced to the market, which at first nearly wiped mechanical off the map. My father decided to buy every mechanical movement he could get his hands on because he still saw their value, while other companies were scrapping them for pennies on the dollar.

Many of the movements we acquired during that time were things like the first automatic winding chronograph movement ever made in Switzerland. These movements have an artistry to them.

My father started taking these movements and designing around them. Other figures in the industry saw what he was doing and began realizing that it was very attractive and innovative, and the credibility and craftsmanship were there.

With one of the first pieces he acquired, we made 100 pieces for Tiffany and Co., which did tremendously well. Tourneau then commissioned a set and my father began making a series of watches for other brands.

At the time, he also had a close relationship with Rolex as well as with Ebel. My father passed on a plan to Rolex and Ebel to tackle Zenith's movements and they all worked on it. My father bought every mechanical movement with a moon phase that Zenith had, while Ebel and Rolex bought the ones that didn't. Rolex then used this whole new series of Zenith "El Primero" movements in the new series of Rolex Daytonas.

My father continued to produce his watches through other companies and local jewelers, which gained him a lot of notoriety.

He then decided to make a line under his own name. He started taking the best watches he produced for other brands and remaking them under his own name.

Before he could carry that out, his health started suffering and he wasn't able to fully execute, so that's where I stepped in.

At the time, we were as generic a company as could be. When I took over the brand, I took some time cleaning it up. I focused on who we were as watchmakers and as a brand and realized it was about us being storytellers.

People wanted to sit down with my father and talk to him because it isn't often that people get to buy the watch from the maker himself and gain from his expertise.

My father never divulge what he went through in the Holocaust because he never explained that side of the brand to anyone. It's now about exhibiting that and showing how something so beautiful can come from something so dark.

That is what created our storytelling in watchmaking and pushed the Waldan brand to be what it is today.

What are you offering today in terms of collections, and will you enhance those or broaden in the space?

In the market, prices are through the roof for watches and exports are going down. Another problem is that many brands have taken their clients for granted and feel they no longer have to earn their trust or even put out products that meet their clients' needs; that's what I'm trying to change.

What we're selling is one hell of a watch for the price. The original heritage creation collection – which consists of 36 mm, highly complicated chronographs at insanely low prices – was created because we have a structure that doesn't allow for third-party costs, and this benefits our customer.

I'm looking to create a beautiful dress watch that exudes the appeal and has the bells and whistles of haute horlogerie, but doesn't break beyond that low- to mid-range price.

How will you handle distribution?

That has always been a challenge because of the competition in the industry and because of the structure of many of the relationships. It doesn't come down to what we know, but who we know.

We had no distribution when I took over, but we now have it in Newport, Rhode Island; Charlotte, North Carolina; Boca Raton, Florida; and Los Angeles, and we're working on developing it in London, Maryland, and Ohio. In New York, we have our own office.

Are all of your pieces limited edition?

We keep our manufacture extremely limited, and we only make 250 pieces per year.

We want our timepieces to be exclusive, so limited production is the only way to guarantee that in the market.

Also, the appeal of the brand is that it's boutique and we're not commercial; we've established our niche in that way.

Is the awareness spread mostly by word of mouth?

It's a mix of everything. The marketing gets done through multiple channels. We still do print advertising, including in a few lifestyle magazines, but much of what I do is digital.

Our website is now more visual, and we're focused on social media. I try to create the feel of holding the watch, which makes a real difference.

I also work with brand ambassadors who act as influencers on social media, and that has been a game changer for us. ●