

Never Stand Still

An Interview with Wilhelm Schmid, Chief Executive Officer, A. Lange & Söhne



Wilhelm Schmid

EDITORS' NOTE Wilhelm Schmid has served as the Chief Executive Officer of Lange Uhren GmbH/A. Lange & Söhne since January 2011. Earlier, he served in senior positions in sales and marketing at BMW and worked in sales and marketing at The Burmah Oil Germany (Burmab-Castrol). Schmid is a resident of Dresden, Germany and holds a diploma in business administration.

COMPANY BRIEF Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Walter Lange reopened the several generations old family watchmaking business destroyed in World War II. The watchmakers of A. Lange & Söhne (alange-soehne.com) continue to

pursue one goal, to craft timepieces that represent the pinnacle of international watchmaking artistry. Walter Lange once said, "There's something that we should expect not only of our watches, but also of ourselves: to never stand still." This is an attitude that A. Lange & Söhne has adopted with respect to its exceptional mechanical masterpieces, and also when dealing with important topics such as sustainability and social responsibility.

Will you discuss the history and heritage of A. Lange & Söhne?

There are many watch brands that have a great history. I think what sets us apart from literally all of them is that we have a unique history because it's literally two parts. It's the first part from 1845 to 1948, where we were a family company, and then after 1948.

From 1845-1948, we were owned by the Lange family and by different Lange members of the family. The company grew very quickly, established a position in the high-end of the market, and remained relevant, profitable and a family company. Even during world wars, recessions and depressions, the brand grew. That was the first part which then came to a standstill after we were expropriated by the Communists and then the company and the brand name literally disappeared until the reunification enabled the company to be recreated on the 7th of December, 1990. It was re-registered and on the 24th of October, 1994, we launched the first four watches.

I was a watch collector all my life. I remember the surprise coming out of the Communist empire was a company in 1994 with four different watches, with four different homemade manufacturer movements, and everything from very simple to extreme complications, and from very classic to very contemporary.

Sustainability is a major focus of the brand. Will you discuss why that's so important and how the brand addresses sustainability?

A. Lange & Söhne is a generational brand. Probably 90 percent of all pocket watches that we have ever produced still exist, and I'd like to believe that probably 99 percent of all wrist watches that we ever produced still exist. It becomes pretty clear that for what we do today, we always have to think about what is happening to these watches in 50 years and 100 years.

We talked about sustainability as we opened our manufacturing facility about five years ago. We put a lot of investment into making sure it's a building with a carbon neutral footprint. We use geothermal energy sources to generate the energy to heat and cool the rooms and to humidify or dehumidify as necessary.



Zeitwerk Date in White Gold



Lange 1 in White Gold

Will you highlight the brand's investment in people?

Our biggest investment is in human resources and our watchmaker school. We always have between 40 and 60 apprenticeship trainings for tool making and watchmaking to insure that when we're long gone, there are still watchmakers that can repair our watches and produce new watches. This is critical to make sure that the watches will survive all of us.

Is technology changing the way A. Lange & Söhne produces its watches?

We have the most modern technology, but the finishing is done by hand and the assembly is done by hand. The regulation of the watch is done by hand.

We use technology where it makes life easy in cutting, drilling, building, etc. but this will never take the place of the watchmaker. A. Lange & Söhne is about craftsmanship which is why we employ more trained watchmakers with a degree in watchmaking than probably most other companies on the planet, including some of the big watch brands

from Switzerland. It is all about working the last millimeter and it's all about the final decoration, and this is not done by machines, it's done by human beings.

Will you discuss A. Lange & Söhne's commitment to the community where it operates?

The majority of our people live in and around our offices. We are a very active part of the community in that we are probably the biggest tax contributor.

Our watchmaker school is of major importance because what all these little cities in a remote place usually lack is young people. This is exactly why we bring young people to Glashütte to become watchmakers and start their families here. I think Glashütte wouldn't be what it is today without us.

Are there certain watches that you wear the most?

I change regularly, as you can imagine. That's part of the privilege of being CEO. There are watches that are very close to my heart. I'm a personal fan of chronographs and they are a big part of my personal collection. ●



1815 Chronograph in Pink Gold