

40 Years of Wempe in New York

An Interview with Ruediger Albers, President, American Wempe Corp.

EDITORS' NOTE Ruediger (Rudy) Albers, President of Wempe USA, began his association with Wempe 33 years ago. Joining in 1987 as a master watchmaker and sales professional at Wempe Hamburg, he quickly ascended, transferring to New York and advancing to General Manager, now leading the U.S. operations for 30 years. He set the tone for expert service and specialized curated guidance offered by Wempe to its elite clientele, embodying the company's mission to be the very best in each of their markets.



Ruediger Albers

COMPANY BRIEF Since 1878, Wempe (wempe.com) has curated exquisite timepieces and jewelry. With 35 stores in seven countries and aboard the cruise ships MS Europa and MS Europa II, and headquartered in Hamburg, Germany, Wempe is a leader in the luxury retail arena. Wempe's flagship store is located on the iconic corner of Fifth Avenue and 55th Street in New York City, offering featured boutiques for Rolex and Patek Philippe, along with an unrivalled selection of the most prestigious watch brands and fine jewelry, including the brand's own.

The world is fighting a public health crisis that is impacting all countries and their citizens. The pandemic is being fought on the front lines by healthcare workers, first responders, those providing supplies and meals, transportation workers and all other essential workers. What do you say to these true leaders and heroes that are risking their lives to protect others?

Wempe has the greatest appreciation for all front line workers who put their personal well-being on the line to help others, especially at the very beginning when New York was hit extremely hard and so little was known about the virus. We salute their selfless bravery and commitment.

Wempe is a purpose-driven organization with a long history of supporting its employees, clients and communities. How critical has it been to adapt your business during this unprecedented time in order to continue to effectively support your employees, clients and communities?

Wempe is a family-owned company and that is clearly apparent throughout the crisis. We were able to maintain and support all our 800 employees worldwide throughout the shutdown. This year Wempe New York is celebrating 40 years in New York, a major milestone, and fortunately we have the financial foundation to make it through crises. To keep in touch with our clients, we had created an Instagram-Live series called "Wednesdays with Wempe" during

which we interviewed company CEOs from home, bringing a mixture of information and entertainment during the height of the social distancing period. Wempe initiated an online auction together with our partner watch brand, Girard Perregaux, to collect funds for City Harvest to feed the neediest New Yorkers.

How have your employees changed the way they work in order to be effective with the changes that have been necessary for all businesses to make and how proud are you to see the resilience of your team?

Wempe New York was very quick in adapting to the new situation. While we were part of the government-mandated shutdown in New York and remained closed from mid-March to mid-June, we worked behind the scenes to be one of the very first retailers on Fifth Avenue to be able to reopen its doors. We had state-of-the-art plexiglass partitions and all CDC recommended protocols in place which inspired confidence that we were taking the protection of our employees and our customers very seriously. We created two separate teams that are able to function independently from each other as well as a very sophisticated app monitoring our employee's health which allows us to react immediately.

There is a great deal of discussion about businesses reopening in a "new normal." What is your outlook for what this new normal may look like and how is Wempe preparing for the next stage in this crisis?

We have seen a steady increase of foot traffic in our two Fifth Avenue stores and a very high conversion rate. We have successfully done virtual presentations of watches and jewelry and invited our clients to virtual cocktail parties which were very well attended and much appreciated. Our well-maintained CRM system is worth gold and reaching out to clients via email,



Celebrating Wempe's 40th anniversary on Fifth Avenue with a special stainless steel edition of the Chopard Alpine Eagle. Limited to 40 pieces.

newsletters and phone, and while it is not new, it had to be enhanced. Come this December, an updated and very user-friendly website will enable us to soon engage in e-commerce.

The low infection and hospitalization rate as well as the advances in treatment is giving everyone a higher degree of confidence. Customers are eager to resume some sense of normalcy and with proper precaution, a visit to a watch and jewelry store can once again be a part of everyday life.

Wempe has a long and deep commitment to New York City which has been heavily impacted by the pandemic. What are the keys to New York City's recovery?

New Yorker's have shown great discipline thereby bringing the pandemic under control and showing the rest of the country that with proper precautions it can be done. It's important to support New York and for people to come back and fill the streets with life. Outdoor restaurants have been set up everywhere giving many streets a European flair. Increased economic activity is crucial on every level and can be done safely.

During this difficult and uncertain time, what are you telling your people and what would you say to young people across the country who are deeply concerned and uncertain about the future?

I have been a New Yorker for over 30 years and have seen the resilience of this great city time and again. A pandemic is a temporary phenomenon, something the world has not experienced in the last 100 years, but I'm confident that New York will bounce back as there is so much to love about it. It will take time, but I'm a firm believer in a full recovery. ●