

50  
1964 2014

# LES AMBASSADEURS

THE LEADING HOUSE OF LEADING NAMES



## From simple Café to Boutique

**L**es Ambassadeurs was founded in 1964. In 2014, the company is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. By coincidence, the year it was founded, the Café “Les Ambassadeurs” on Geneva’s Rue du Rhône closed down. This was a famous bistro, which was regarded as one of the most sought-after meeting places among diplomatic circles for 20 years. The founder of the company turned out to be a true visionary when he decided to adopt this name which was both nice sounding and meaningful and which clearly expressed the corporate philosophy. It was in the building formerly housing the café that the first Boutique – now one of four – opened. And as has been the case throughout the past 50 years, being cutting-edge ambassadors for its long-term loyal partners is still a great honour for Les Ambassadeurs’ employees – be it in the realm of luxury watches or high-quality jewellery.

Some of the key elements in the history of the development of Les Ambassadeurs can be traced from client services through the steady development of the brand to the final slogan “The Leading House of Leading Names”. But in this edition, as a house of brands, Les Ambassadeurs also remains true to one overriding aspiration: a passion for beautiful watches and unique jewellery.



Café Les Ambassadeurs  
in the 1950s

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## FOREWORD

Dear readers,

For the past 50 years Les Ambassadeurs has been the reference in its field, faithfully accompanying and advising a great many watch and jewellery enthusiasts. The story began in 1964 in Geneva, followed by Zurich, St. Moritz and finally Lugano. We also owe this strong position to a great many top-notch watch and jewellery brands that have remained loyal to us all these years.

Whether in relationships with our clients, our watch brands or our jewellery suppliers, solid partnerships have always been the most important factor in the history of our company. This holds true both for management and personnel, because trust and reliability are the elements that now enable us to toast our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2014.



Together with you, we wish to celebrate the fascinating history of a company that owes its name to a venerable Geneva café which used to be a favourite meeting point for the city's elite. But also the history of a company of which the establishment in Zurich's Bahnhofstrasse marked a turning point in the architecture of its time. This brochure will also give a face to all our employees who have made a decisive contribution to the success of our company.

I would like to thank each and every one of you for your unfailing loyalty.

With kind regards,

**Dr. Renato A. Vanotti**  
*Chairman of the Board*  
*Les Ambassadeurs SA*

# Les Ambassadeurs' 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary

AN INTERVIEW WITH CEO JOACHIM ZIEGLER

**In 1964, 50 years ago, "Les Ambassadeurs" opened its doors in Geneva for the first time. How did this luxury watch and jewellery boutique decide on its name?**

It was a stroke of luck. And a good choice because it is a simple and altogether great name which perfectly describes our mission and our origins while being completely international. At the time, the Café Les Ambassadeurs in the Rue du Rhône was on the point of closing. Up until then, it had been the meeting place for diplomatic circles in Geneva. It was in this café, whose name was taken over by the

founders of our company, that we opened our first boutique in 1964.

**At the time, one might say that Les Ambassadeurs was the first mono-brand boutique in Switzerland, above all for Omega. Why that particular choice?**

Omega is the first watch brand to have thought of not selling its watches simply through its some 200 representatives, but also in a boutique specifically dedicated to the brand in an exceptional location. The instigator of this idea was Gameo in Lausanne, the company that was then responsible for distributing Omega. Charles Bauty, owner of Gameo, was also the General Distributor of Tissot and Audemars Piguet Switzerland and these two brands started to enrich Omega's offering. But the transformation into a true multi-brand distributor only took place much later.

**The boutique was not alone for long.**

**When did the expansion from Geneva begin?**

Things began to move under the leadership of Gameo's visionary director Charles Bauty, who undertook the extension of the boutique network, starting with Zurich in 1971. The opening of the store at number 64 Bahnhofstrasse created quite a stir. It was the first time that a watch boutique had displayed its wares on several floors, as well as associat-



Photo: Marvin Zillm



HISTORY >

1964, founding:  
first boutique on the Quai Général-Guisan/  
on the Rue du Rhône in Geneva

ing them with Haute Couture apparel and accessories. But the new building in the Bahnhofstrasse also became a place of pilgrimage for architectural enthusiasts. Its architectural concept was revolutionary, especially in light of the fact that the floors were connected by escalators.

**Before the expansion continued, there was a merger between Siber Hegner and Les Ambassadeurs.**

In 1976, Les Ambassadeurs was bought up by Siber Hegner, which was part of today's DKSH Holding SA. At this difficult time just after the petrol crisis, this came as a new stroke of luck for our company, because Siber Hegner decided to encourage the expansion of Les Ambassadeurs and it was thus that new subsidiaries were opened in prime locations: St. Moritz in 1979 and Lugano in 1983.

**Nonetheless, Geneva remained the group's flagship store for a long time?**

... and still is today, even though the Zurich store has become consistently more important, to the point of being on a par with Geneva following the recent renovations. Don't forget that the heart of the Swiss watchmaking world beats in Geneva. However, the key role that our Geneva boutique plays is particularly due to Frédéric Jeanjaquet who managed the branch until 1997. For decades, he was the uncrowned ruler of the Western Swiss watchmaking world, mainly thanks to his expertise and his keen sense of the market and brands. As a trained watchmaker, he enjoyed huge respect from our partner brands as well as the watch creators.

**Great personalities have always been key to selling watches. Aside from Jeanjaquet, have other people played important roles in the history of Les Ambassadeurs?**

Jeanjaquet succeeded in having a top-notch team of professionals around him. Aside from Jeanjaquet, Melchior

Brunner was also a major figure in the parent company in Geneva. Watch enthusiasts and professionals congregated in Les Ambassadeurs' workshop because Brunner and his team members had a solution to every technical problem. Our repair shops in Geneva, Zurich and Lugano have inherited this philosophy.

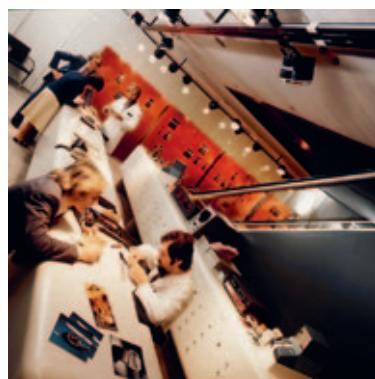
It was my predecessor, Patrick Frischknecht, who continued to develop our reputation as a temple of the art of watchmaking over nearly 15 years by focusing very early on niche brands – many of which are now highly sought after by collectors. While space would not permit me to provide an exhaustive list of noteworthy employees, I will just cite the example of Rolf Richner, the most gifted salesman we have ever had in Zurich. Richner contributed to our boutique's success for four decades as a highly professional, experienced salesman and manager. It therefore makes me very happy to know that in this issue of L.A Magazine and the next he will be presenting the major iconic models he encountered in his long experience at Les Ambassadeurs.

**At the beginning of the 1960s, Les Ambassadeurs decided to transform itself into a multi-brand boutique geared towards clients and service.**

Indeed, that period marked the beginning of Les Ambassadeurs' transformation into a "Leading House of Leading Names". Our slogan, which remains valid today, comes from our CEO at the time, Dr Heinz O. Weber. Parallel to this, new partner brands such as Cartier, Blancpain and many others were consolidated, while never losing sight of the necessary sense of individuality. Volume has never been a concern for Les Ambassadeurs – we have always focused on quality and especially on comprehensive customer service.



1971: opening of the second exclusive and modern boutique on the Bahnhofstrasse in Zurich



1970s: excellence in customer service is already an acknowledged characteristic of the brand

1979: St. Moritz boutique opens

*“We have always focused on quality and especially on comprehensive customer service”*

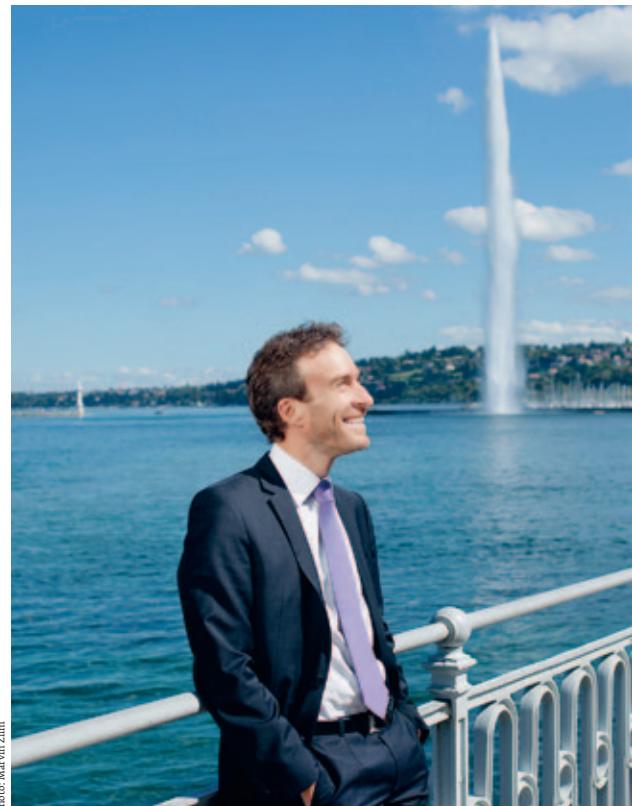


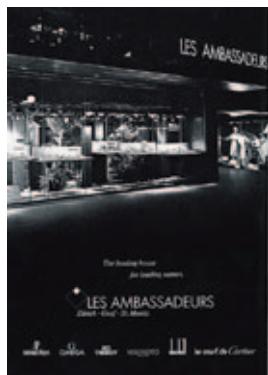
Photo: Martin Zillm

**In your opinion, what are Les Ambassadeurs' strong points for the future?**

These range from our salespeople's professional training to the extreme quality of our repair workshop. Expertise and confidence are decisive factors for our clients, particularly in the realm of after-sales service where they can be in direct contact with our watchmakers. We intend to intensify these contacts even more in future and especially with watch collectors and connoisseurs, such as through our Watchfinder search engine which is available to our clients on our website. In the past few years, we have focused all our watchmaking workshops on our clients' needs. And in our lounges, that we call "Espace Connaisseur", we organise events specially designed to offer watch enthusiasts a closer look at the fascinating world of watches and jewellery.

**Les Ambassadeurs is now part of Excellence Holding. Has the strategy implemented in the 1980s been maintained by the new owners?**

It has been continually extended. Today we offer the widest range of brands in Switzerland and we are one of the most important meeting places for watch collectors and connoisseurs in the world. The Al-Rayes family has been the sole owner of Les Ambassadeurs for more than ten years. Our development over the past few years is solely due to its strong attachment to continuity and stability, combined with its passion for the art of watchmaking. Dr Renato A. Vanotti is the Chairman of the Board of Excel-



1983: Lugano boutique opens

1980s: complete change in strategy and shift to multi-brand sales



1995/98: diagram with the door symbol and slogan



2007: first edition of L.A Magazine

lence Holding, which he heads in a resolutely circumspect manner that greatly contributes to its current success. He leaves me as CEO plenty of room for manoeuvre, while providing me with the support of his long experience.

**Many jewellers and watch boutiques today survive almost exclusively through “global shoppers” and the Chinese in particular. How are things looking for Les Ambassadeurs?** We have had an international focus at all our sites, while never losing sight of our local clientele. This has always played a very important role that we want to further reinforce – notably through our watchmaking workshops and the Espace Connaisseur serving as a meeting place for our local clients. We must not forget our origins and our roots, which are definitely local.

**Les Ambassadeurs has always played a pioneering role when it comes to the interior design of its shops. Will this still be the case in future?**

Indeed, this approach began in Zurich at the beginning of the 1970s with the Omega building. This revolutionary concept for the time brought us a considerable audience and indeed nearly every day, whole classes came to sit on little fold-up chairs to sketch the architecture of our boutique. Today, there are different needs, so we have redesigned and developed our four shops according to completely modern criteria.

**But a parallel with the first boutique in Zurich remains – namely the presence of several floors?**

That is true – the watchmaking workshop, the advisory and sales area and the Espace Connaisseur extend over three floors. We want to be closer to our clients and above all the watch collectors. Thanks to this modern concept, customers must feel at home with us and be well advised without feeling obliged to buy. They must be able to take their time, and

we need to offer them conditions enabling them to decide for a watch or a piece of jewellery. And even once this decision is taken, we are there for our clients by offering them the best possible service in our workshops.

**What are the critical lynchpins in Les Ambassadeurs’ multi-brand strategy?**

Our employees are the key ingredient in our success. Their passion for watches and jewellery, their know-how and the customer service they provide make all the difference. They also constitute the basis of our success with our regular, loyal local clients and our extensive client base all over the world, which includes important watch collectors and connoisseurs. These aficionados know that we have the most extensive range of watch and jewellery brands in Switzerland and that they will be served with charm, competence and neutrality, in addition to the fact that our workshops remain at their disposal long after they have made their purchase. Thanks to the recent introduction of our Watchfinder, our clients can also obtain information on the most recent products on-line at any time and no matter where they are in the world.

**In 2014, Les Ambassadeurs is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. What are you planning for this jubilee year?** A large number of different events for our clients, partners and employees. We kicked off with updating our history, an endeavour undertaken in collaboration with the Public History Research team. A great many documents and a vast amount of knowledge – which had been lost over time – have now been recovered and reassembled.

**Are you planning a jubilee watch?**

Not just a watch – an entire collection! We owe it to our regular clients and watch collectors.



2008: Espace Connaisseur



2010/13: refurbished boutiques

# Seven floors of watches, jewellery and accessories

THE OPENING OF THE ZURICH BRANCH OF LES AMBASSADEURS WAS A MAJOR EVENT FOR THE BAHNHOFSTRASSE.

**A**pril 1971: An important moment is about to take place for the staff of the Les Ambassadeurs boutique. They are travelling to the newly inaugurated Zurich branch – and they are in fact flying there, since things might as well be done in style. After all, the idea is to celebrate the expansion in Zurich and in particular the new building that is revolutionary for the time. Even the experienced watch sales people in Geneva have never seen a seven-floor watch and jewellery store.

Like all visitors, the Geneva employees enjoy a guided tour of all floors of this sensational new construction located at number 64 Bahnhofstrasse.

From the ground floor right the way up to the very top, the boutique is brimming with a wide variety of areas dedicated to sales, advice and training – all with watches, fashion and jewellery under the same roof. The vision of Charles Bauty, the driving force behind Les Ambassadeurs and the director of the parent company, Gameo, has become a reality.

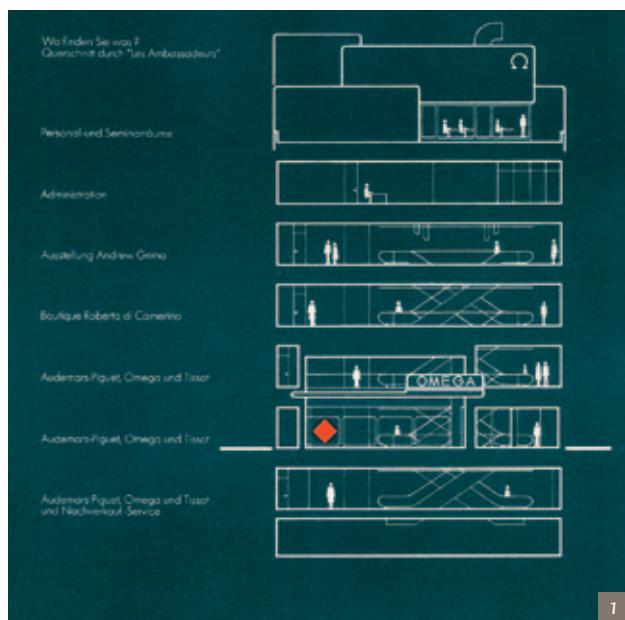
Omega has brought in its brass band from Geneva to celebrate the inauguration, providing it with an appropriate musical setting. The event attracts thousands of bystanders. The mayor of Zurich, Sigmund Widmer, makes sure he also takes a guided tour of the new building with the Les Ambassadeurs management team. He thanks them on behalf of the town and presents them with an award for the quality of the building. In short, the inauguration of the new building in Zurich is a big event and so it should be.

This is because what Zurich-based architect Paul Steger and Gameo's interior designer have achieved goes beyond anything previously seen on Zurich's Bahnhofstrasse. In a very short time, the building – affectionately known as the Omega Building due to the large advertisement it carries – becomes a pilgrimage site for architectural students and a classic building that is shown to entire classes who spend their drawing classes studying its ultra-modern façade.

The front of the building was inspired by the Bally building, located just next door and which aesthetically dominates

this part of the Bahnhofstrasse. This building had itself laid a new milestone for the Bahnhofstrasse. Completed in 1968, it replaced the traditional historical architectural approach with a resolutely modern touch. The Omega building features a joint-free sheet steel façade. The choice of a relatively dark colour relates to the choice of windows that darken when exposed to sunshine.

This makes it possible to maintain a façade with a uniform appearance in all weather. The architect designed these windows to span two floors, so that the ground floor and the intermediate floor could be visually connected for outside observers. But the main aim was to provide maximum space for window decoration and to create as vast a setting as possible for the creators' future projects. Finally, it was about making this even then high-profile yet inauspicious location an optimal sales platform and a visiting card for the company. In addition, the façade provides an open connection between the internal and external space. The traditional principle of the closed jewellery store has vanished. Clients





1. Diagram, cross-section view of the building, taken from an old Les Ambassadeurs brochure
2. Inauguration of the boutique on the Bahnhofstrasse in 1971
3. Snapshot of the two-floor display window
4. Glimpse of the ground floor
5. Welcoming Japanese groups on the lower ground floor
6. On the lower ground floor, fast individual adjustments can be made for sales





- 7. The modern in-store phone system guarantees perfect communications
- 8. Customer advice on the intermediate floor
- 9. Schoolchildren draw the façade of the Bahnhofstrasse 64 building



must be able to move around freely as if they were in a large department store.

This generous space is evident from the moment one enters the shop. In a unique fashion for a watch shop, an escalator located next to the first sales areas takes visitors down to the lower ground floor level or up to the first floor. Groups of Japanese tourists who regularly walk up and down the Bahnhofstrasse are guided to the lower ground floor level where they are welcomed at specially designed stands by sales advisors who speak their language. The after-sales service department is right next to this area. It was only later that the lower ground floor also became home to the Dunhill boutique with clothing and accessories for the elegant man.

Clients taking the escalator up from the ground floor reach an initial intermediate space (first floor) featuring watches with gold bracelets, which are very popular at the time. The floor just above features fashion by Roberta di Camerino, a Venetian designer well-known in the 1970s. Ladies' Haute Couture is offered here under the professional eye of the head of fashion, Beatrice Dreher (-Locher). Les Ambassadeurs is responsible for the exclusive distribution of the Venetian brand in Switzerland.

Another floor up is the jewellery exhibition area. Englishman Andrew Grima, born in Rome, makes his taste the

symbol of a new generation as noted by the Zurich branch's brochure at the time. Les Ambassadeurs provides an appropriate showcase for his international reputation.

The two upper floors are home to the offices and training area as well as a vast watchmaking workshop. Using the most modern equipment for the time, including video recordings, representatives of brands from all over Switzerland distributed by Les Ambassadeurs are trained in giving advice on and selling the latest models.

During the restructuring that took place in the late 1980s and 90s, the boutique on the Bahnhofstrasse was resized. The area devoted to fashion was closed and Les Ambassadeurs began to focus more on watch brands and luxury jewellery.

With the completion of the avant-garde refurbishment of all four branches, Les Ambassadeurs is beginning its jubilee year in 2014 with a modern, refined new look. For the boutiques' new design, Lucerne-based architect Albert Bolinger has used only natural wood, natural stone and fabrics selected from contemporary colour compositions. The three floors of the boutique are clearly focused on total client service, from repairs on the lower ground floor through the ground floor sales area to events for collectors and enthusiasts held in specially dedicated "Espace Connaisseur" rooms on the first floor.



- 10. The second floor is home to the fashion department
- 11. On the third floor, clients encounter an exhibition area presenting jewellery  
The escalator provides an effortless means of transport
- 12. The administrative offices and watchmaking workshops are on the fourth floor
- 13. Employees can grab something to eat in the spacious canteen on the fifth floor
- 14. The fifth floor is home to training rooms equipped with the most modern equipment
- 15. The way things look after renovation work in 2013



# In its customers' service

A MECHANICAL WATCH NEEDS TO BE TAKEN CARE OF AND LES AMBASSADEURS' AFTER-SALES SERVICE IS ONE OF ITS STRONG POINTS. AT LES AMBASSADEURS, CLIENTS CAN DEPEND ON HIGHLY QUALIFIED WATCHMAKERS, WHO ARE THERE TO CATER TO THEIR EVERY NEED IN EVERY ESTABLISHMENT. THIS HAS BEEN THE CASE FOR THE PAST FIVE DECADES. AND NATURALLY WILL CONTINUE TO BE IN THE FUTURE.

In the 1970s, Les Ambassadeurs Boutiques made an almost futuristic impression. The chromed steel and the long sales counters with their light-coloured, white and modern design were inspired by the aesthetics in the sci-fi films of the time. The Boutiques represented far more than simple points of sale; they were a tribute to luxury watches in a "high-tech" environment. Depots filled with a wide variety of supplies, spare parts and other elements provided an indispensable complement to the customised display. Already at that time, these parts formed the basis of a reliable, exhaustive after-sales service that top movers and shakers appreciated to the full. Amongst them was Sean Connery alias James Bond, who entrusted his watch to the Geneva boutique for repair.

To this day, with its Boutiques featuring a new design and streamlined style, Les Ambassadeurs considers its after-sales service to be its number one priority. On the lower floor of each shop, the in-house specialists take charge of watches requiring repairs. The literal transparency of the workshops enables Les Ambassadeurs' clients to have an idea of the maintenance required by a watch. In this respect, the watchmakers' professional, specialised advice is a key value amongst the after-sales services offered.

Les Ambassadeurs traditionally offers a first-class sales platform for products

**JAMES BOND 007 BEI LES AMBASSADEURS GENF**



James Bond (Sean Connery) jagte keine feindlichen Agenten bei Les Ambassadeurs. Der Grund seines Besuches war die Reparatur seiner Uhr. Und da James Bond Wert auf einen einwandfreien Service legt - im Einsatz bedeutet Zeit (und Zeitmessung) Sein oder Nichtsein - kommt er natürlich zu Les Ambassadeurs.

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from the workshops of its brand partners. This encompasses various events, notably including watch and jewellery presentations. As both intermediary and emissary, Les Ambassadeurs hopes through these occasions to encourage direct contact between clients and brand partners: "creating a connection between people and brands" is indeed the mantra of the company philosophy. With its Espace Connaisseur, a meeting place for watch admirers and devotees, Les Ambassadeurs has created a setting in which clients can relax and admire impressive collector's items in peace and quiet. Evenings devoted to connoisseurs and fans are organised in the Espace Connaisseur on select themes, with talks given by well recognised guest speakers in the world of watchmaking and experts from the most renowned watch brands.

1. Excerpt from Les Ambassadeurs' gazette, June 1979
2. Regular Swiss customers in the 1970s
3. After-sales service reception counters in Zurich in the 1970s
4. Goldsmithing and watch movement workshop at 64 Bahnhofstrasse, in the 1970s
5. Modern watchmaking workshop behind a transparent glass façade, 2014
6. Depot with spare parts, 1970s





All Les Ambassadeurs' employees have always been trained on the different models and collections. They benefit from ongoing further training in the form of specialised workshops. Les Ambassadeurs owns a perfectly equipped training centre at the main headquarters in Zurich for this purpose. Clients can thus be sure that sales advisors have the appropriate experience, even given the wide choice of brands.

Ever since its foundation, Les Ambassadeurs has always focused on the wishes of both its national and international clients. Still today, much of the clientele is Swiss and local roots have always been regarded as very important and are still amongst its basic values. This element has played a key role in its choice of location with boutiques located in town centres near prestigious hotels, banks and shopping areas, and thus close to clients and loyal or potential clients.

In earlier times, one could still reach the doors of the shops and Boutiques by bus, even the prestigious addresses such as on Zurich's Bahnhofstrasse. The above picture taken during summer 1971 shows three buses parked in front of the Boutique on the Bahnhofstrasse. The Japanese tourists they brought to Les Ambassadeurs were part of the first Asian groups to have joined the circle of the most significant clients during the following years. Today, the Boutiques are more focused on individual clients and small groups.





1. Training centre in Zurich, 1970s
2. Les Ambassadeurs present at watchmaking events, 1960s
3. Every year, Les Ambassadeurs organises a number of events
4. The first tour buses with groups of Japanese tourists parked in front of the Bahnhofstrasse in Zurich, 1971
5. Sales advice for Japanese clientele
6. Serving the Japanese clientele: Les Ambassadeurs, 1980s



# Frédéric Jeanjaquet

A WATCHMAKER BECOMES THE LEADING LIGHT IN THE WATCHMAKING CITY OF GENEVA

**N**euchâtel native, Frédéric Jeanjaquet, made a mark on the first three decades of the history of Les Ambassadeurs. A trained watchmaker from La Chaux-de-Fonds, he came to be regarded as the prince of jewellers and watch salesmen in the watchmaking city of Geneva. He principally owed this reputation to his extensive knowledge of watchmaking, as well as his contacts which extended to the very heart of the watchmaking workshops and his acute sense of the market.

At a very young age, this son of a Neuchâtel labourer managed to secure a place for himself at the very pinnacle amongst connoisseurs and watch sellers in Geneva. This was somewhat unusual in the Swiss watchmaking sector which for decades was characterised by family businesses. Jeanjaquet began work at Les Ambassadeurs shortly after the opening of the first boutique in Geneva.

Jeanjaquet was endowed in abundant measure with precisely these qualities of competence and experience. Born in 1937 in the watchmaking town of La Chaux-de-Fonds, he virtually absorbed watchmaking with his mother's milk. Following his training as a watchmaker at the Neuchâtel Technicum, the young Jeanjaquet embarked on an unusual activity for the time: instead of retreating to a workshop, he opted to spend some time abroad. He applied for a job in London and thus acquired the know-how required to be a watch sales advisor at a well-known jewellery store – not to mention the fact that he learnt English which opened many doors for him decades later.



Jeanjaquet brought to Geneva the exact knowledge that was most needed. A mere few months after he was hired, he was entrusted with the management of Les Ambassadeurs. The boutique located on the corner of the elegant shopping streets of the Rue du Rhône and the Quai Guisan swiftly became a reference. Within just a few months, it had acquired a top-notch reputation amongst affluent tourists due to its exceptional customer service.

A great market strategist, Jeanjaquet understood the potential presented by foreign clients and in conjunction with the hotels, implemented a system targeting high-end individual clients in Geneva's luxury hotels. This discreet, direct service paid off and soon Jeanjaquet was able to open a little branch in an exceptional location in the heart of the Noga Hilton Hotel. He was thus able to count on a regular clientele consisting of rich Arabs and their families.

Frédéric Jeanjaquet was less present in the public eye. His strong points were in relation to the maintenance of his extensive network of contacts with the watchmaking world. When a company put a new model into the market, it asked his advice because he was able to evaluate watches both from a technical standpoint and in terms of the reception on the market they were targeting. He frequently invited watchmakers to his holiday home in the Canton of Valais, or he was their guest. Thanks to this close collaboration with all the watch brands, Jeanjaquet made an essential contribution to Les Ambassadeurs' strong, sustainable multi-brand strategy, developed and implemented around 1980. He leveraged the trust thus gained among partner brands in a tar-

In 1956, Jeanjaquet graduated as a watchmaker from the Neuchâtel Technicum. →

In Geneva, Les Ambassadeurs regularly assumed a sponsorship role. Be it on the lake for sailing regattas or on the road for cycle races, measuring time is essential to sport. →



geted manner. Little by little, he began to add selected brands to the range. The partner subsidiary in Zurich enormously appreciated both his experience and his network of relationships.

Jeanjaquet decided to retire in 1997 and to focus exclusively on his private life. It was only after he left that Zurich finally became Les Ambassadeurs' principal headquarters. What remains is the memory of the "leading light" of Geneva's watchmaking sector, which has lived on even after his death in 2010.



↑ With the staff during an official group visit to the Geneva boutique in the 1960s.

← In 2010, Les Ambassadeurs relocated to the nearby number 62, Rue du Rhône. This move also required transferring the Espace Connaisseur lounge, which opened in 2008, and which was now located on the third and highest floor of this highly successful global concept. The branch is now run by Ignaz Steg and his team.

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# Corporate story

THE STRONG VISIBILITY OF THE BRAND IS DUE AS MUCH TO THE DOOR SYMBOL AS TO THE LES AMBASSADEURS' SLOGAN. BOTH ARE A REPRESENTATION OF THE MULTI-BRAND CONCEPT THAT HAS PROVEN ITS WORTH. SINCE IT WAS FOUNDED, LES AMBASSADEURS HAS PLACED A HIGH PREMIUM ON HAVING A SUITABLE VISUAL IDENTITY.

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Longstanding employees at Les Ambassadeurs enjoy telling the tale that a long time ago already, it was almost impossible for a pedestrian to walk past the windows of one of Les Ambassadeurs' boutiques without looking at them. Right from the day they opened, the designs that were consistently unusual and indeed sometimes radical, contributed to attracting attention. Display windows have always been designed in line with the inside decoration, and both are resolutely up to date. Designer Joël Racine, who served



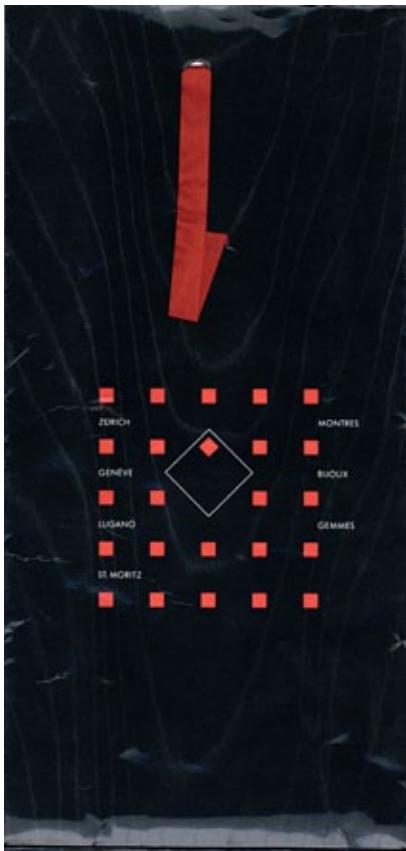
for many years as head decorator for Les Ambassadeurs, played a key role in this regard. He had a definite gift for capturing the aesthetic trends of his time and skilfully transforming them. The display windows were redone four times a year – at each change of season – with the most recent collections, and enhanced with festive decorations before Christmas.

*Futuristic interior design  
from the 1970s, with detail*



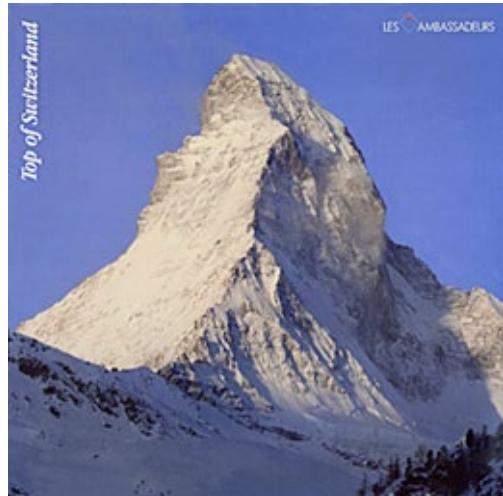
At the end of the 1970s, Les Ambassadeurs began to work on a new visual identity for its media image. The coloured squares on a plain background swiftly became a distinctive mark with extensive visibility – despite it being abstract. The CEO at the time, Heinz O. Weber, invested heavily in advertising in the print media. His aim was to develop the Swiss client base. Catalogues and luxury magazines were produced in collaboration with Weber. A vinyl record with Swiss folk music, intended as a corporate gift, was also created at this time and became something of a curiosity in the history of Les Ambassadeurs. The summary appearing on the cover mainly sought to familiarise foreign

clients with the panorama of the Swiss Alps, and was entirely in Japanese and English. The catalogues of the period were the predecessors of the L.A Magazine, which today is right up there with them from an aesthetic point of view.



Bag from the 1980s

Title page from  
a Les Ambassadeurs'  
catalogue, 1978



Les Ambassadeurs' record with folk music  
and a panoramic picture of the Alps, circa 1981



Les Ambassadeurs has always been a benchmark in terms of the graphic quality of its publications: catalogues and gazettes from 1978-1982



Additionally, it was under Heinz O. Weber that the slogan “The Leading House for Leading Names” was introduced. At the end of the 1990s, the CEO at the time, Patrick Frischknecht, took over this mantra and transformed it to “The Leading House of Leading Names”. The visual identity in 1995 was also revamped accordingly, and slightly adapted. At the time, the advertising agency and graphic designer Frédéric Dubois very enthusiastically developed a concept that proved to be a huge success in the long term. Behind this concept was the idea of the doors symbol. This was intended to attribute a door to each brand specially designed for it, with the doors presented together in alphabetical order. The graphic design of the image continued to develop until it reached the current form in 2013. The united doors of the brands ended up forming a whole house and became the distinguishing mark of Les Ambassadeurs. The slogan and the symbolism of the doors continue to make a key contribution to promoting the brand's extensive visibility.



Les Ambassadeurs launched a luxury publication in 2007 with its own magazine, L.A Magazine, which presents both the most recent creations from the partner brands and information regarding the values and development of watchmaking. Its clear, completely independent concept laid the first stone of a magazine that is still playing a frontrunner role in the world of watchmaking. Published every six months in a run of 80,000 copies, it unites information, interviews and specific corporate advertising within a perfectly coherent whole. The magazine has become Les Ambassadeurs' most important "ambassador" with the media. In the same way as the design of the boutiques, the aesthetics are central to the design of the magazine.

*First visual  
identity, 1995*



*Colour  
interpretation  
circa 2000*



*Visual identity  
circa 2007*



*Current visual identity, 2013*



*Long-serving head decorator at Les Ambassadeurs, Joël Racine learnt his trade at OMEGA. One of his most famous works at the time was the legendary "Uhrzeitfenster" produced for Swiss television. The logo represented an image that was dear to Swiss households for several decades. Today its charming sobriety still wins hearts.*

# Jasmine Audemars

PARTNER TO MANY FAMOUS BRANDS, IT IS HOWEVER WITH AUDEMARS PIGUET THAT LES AMBASSADEURS HAS NURTURED ITS LONGEST COLLABORATION. FROM ITS BEGINNINGS, IT HAS OFFERED THE PRESTIGIOUS WATCHES MADE BY THE ONLY SWISS WATCHMAKER STILL OWNED BY ITS FOUNDING FAMILY. JASMINE AUDEMARS, CHAIRWOMAN OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE MANUFACTURE, EXPLAINS THIS LONGEVITY AND DESCRIBES THE FUTURE OF THE SECTOR.

## For how long have you known Les Ambassadeurs?

It goes back to the foundation of the company. For us, Les Ambassadeurs has been an important partner in Switzerland since the beginning. In a family of watchmakers, it is quite usual to talk about partners. It has been like that since my childhood and when I was growing up. As a result, I was introduced to this world very early on. Since I have been chairing Audemars Piguet, I visit Les Ambassadeurs boutiques whenever I am travelling.

## Certain brands prefer to be represented in mono-brand boutiques. What is your stance on this development?

It is undoubtedly an important development in which we have participated by opening our own boutiques. That doesn't prevent us from continuing to work extensively with partners with a multi-brand strategy. Les Ambassadeurs maintains essential contacts with our ever-increasing number of end clients. That applies just as much to the after-sales service as it does to sales themselves. In both these domains we need the know-how of partners such as Les Ambassadeurs. During the past few years, we have nevertheless had to reduce our too extensive sales network and focus on solid partners.

## What is the relevance of the after-sales service in this new strategy?

It is a key issue for the entire watchmaking industry, and in fact one of the most important challenges facing of all us. This is particularly true of luxury brands, since clients want global information on their watch and on possible repairs. The same thing goes for watchmaking around the world. When a part breaks, the client wants to know exactly which element it was and when he or she will get the watch back.

## Has that not always been the case?

Unfortunately not! There were many recurrent mistakes. Today, more than ever we need well-trained people.

Currently, we are also training watchmakers from Singapore with this in mind. In fact, Asia represents an important developing market for us. We send watchmakers to Asia and train Asian watchmakers here in Le Brassus. This cultural exchange has immense importance and value for both sides. A young watchmaker from our valley can acquire a great deal of experience by working in Singapore for a year or two.

## What are the keys to selling watchmaking and jewellery when it comes to meeting clients' requirements?

Les Ambassadeurs is a model in this respect and its Espace Connaisseur is an exceptional concept. This global customer service creates a close relationship with buyers and provides important and essential information. These are indispensable elements these days, when it comes to luxury watches. All watchmaking salespeople should follow this path. This corresponds to the true needs of our sector.

## In interviews, you always talk about the "genuine experience" that Audemars Piguet represents. Can you explain what this is about?

We enjoy talking about it, since this concept is linked to our history. When they come to us, watchmaking clients and sales advisors must know our history. They need to discover the origins of our watch brand in the Vallée de Joux, in Le Brassus. It is not enough just to see the Manufacture, one also needs to understand that our valley's art of Haute Horlogerie has a history that dates back to well before the founding of Audemars Piguet. The watchmaking expertise in our valley is unique in the world. It is up to us to preserve it and to move it forward.



Display of Audemars Piguet watches in the 1960s.

## What are the markets of tomorrow in your opinion?

Europe and Switzerland remain the priority, even though Asia is a strong market and South America represents a substantial market for our watches. We are convinced that if local demand is high, it will be elsewhere too. This

is an aspect that we must not forget. In future we must continually maintain and develop a certain balance between the markets that will help prevent us from becoming dependent on the economic development of a particular region of the world.

**How do you view the long-term prospects for the Swiss watchmaking industry?**

The Swiss watchmaking industry needs to protect the exceptional position it holds. It will achieve this by making the right decisions. One of the key issues currently facing the sector is that all its stakeholders want to be part of the luxury segment, whereas we must nonetheless not neglect the mid-range and entry-level segments, because the watchmaking industry is a pyramid. If the base is fragile, the entire pyramid runs the risk of collapsing. But fortunately, we have Swatch. This brand has given our industry solid foundations and I hope things will continue in this vein.

**How has Audemars Piguet developed in the past 50 years?**

In the 1960s, we were a small brand that employed a maximum of 150 people in Le Brassus. Most of our watches were dispatched by local post. Like all the other brands, we were part of the distribution revolution and have built up a solid sales network, especially over the past ten or 15 years. Since then, a lot has changed. Our workforce used to be mainly composed of watchmakers, whereas today we have specialists in all domains, from marketing to finance through to the legal department. Previously, an outside lawyer looked after a few cases, but this would no longer be possible today.

**You worked in journalism for a long time, notably as the editor of the *Journal de Genève*. Were you also involved in the watchmaking industry then?**

I was involved in this sector when I was a journalist in the economic department. After becoming editor-in-chief, it was no longer my beat. I maintained a certain distance while holding this position, so as to avoid any conflict of interest. But I have always had watchmaking in my blood because I grew up in a family of watchmakers here in Le Brassus. In my family conversations were almost exclusively about watches and our sector. I clearly remember the launch of the Royal Oak, as well as all the discussions with my father about the issues of that period.



Photo: Marvin Zlim

Jasmine Audemars has been the Chairwoman of the Audemars Piguet Board of Directors since 1992. A graduate in social science and economic history, she served as editor of the *Journal de Genève* from 1980 to 1992, and was one of the first women to hold a position of this nature. She is the great-granddaughter of Jules-Louis Audemars, founder of the company. Audemars Piguet is the only major luxury watchmaking manufacturer to have remained in the hands of the family. Jasmine Audemars is the co-founder of the Cultural Council of the Fondation de la Haute Horlogerie.

# Rolf Richner's classic watches

FOR 40 YEARS ALREADY, CLIENTS AND YOUNG SALES ADVISORS HAVE BENEFITED FROM HIS VAST EXPERIENCE AND BROAD KNOWLEDGE OF WATCHES AND JEWELLERY.

Rolf Richner began work at Les Ambassadeurs in 1973 as a sales advisor. After training as a chef – his parents managed a restaurant in Zurich – he sought a challenge in a different sector, something that would fulfil his desire for personal contact and his love of good-quality, high-end products. For Les Ambassadeurs, recruiting him was a stroke of luck. For many years, he also served as branch manager of the Zurich boutique. For the jubilee celebration, Rolf Richner presents his personal selection of the

ten most precious and most highly appreciated objects illustrating the great art of watchmaking.

*You can find the watch of your dreams in just a few clicks by using the online watchfinder. More than 2,000 models from 20 brands can be selected according to various criteria at [www.lesambassadeurs.ch/watchfinder](http://www.lesambassadeurs.ch/watchfinder). The tool is also available as an app for tablets.*



Original 1972 Royal Oak in its presentation box



Royal Oak 15202ST.1240ST.01

## THE ROYAL OAK BY AUDEMARS PIGUET

"Audemars Piguet's Royal Oak was launched on the market a year before I arrived at Les Ambassadeurs – namely in 1972. It represented an almost complete break with the traditional style of mechanical watches. It was the first steel watch with a price that matched that of classic gold men's wristwatches at the time. The truly revolutionary element was its steel case, which was a perfect combination of elegance and sportiness. Its octagonal bezel was inspired by the porthole of a British warship called the HMS Royal Oak. Eight gold screws secure the bezel to the case to form a single whole. It is not only decorative but also functional."

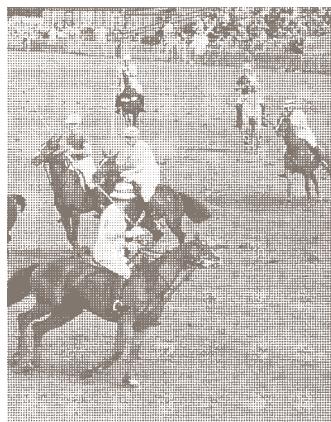


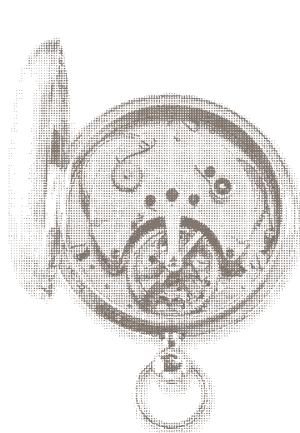
#### THE REVERSO BY JAEGER-LECOULTRE

"Polo players always came up against the same problem: the glass of their wrist-watches was repeatedly scratched or broken after an intense match. Famous manufacturer Jaeger-LeCoultre developed the Reverso with its reversible case at the request of British officers deployed in India. The back of the watch was generally engraved with a coat-of-arms. This model was launched in 1931 and the Reverso is a true icon of the Art Deco movement, with the cult still very much alive. This watch is characterised by a space that may be completely personalised – and anything is possible, from engraving to precious stones. Most clients choose a monogram. Jaeger-LeCoultre also has the particularity of manufacturing the world's smallest mechanical watch movement. It is used for specific models made by the brand."



Reverso Classique – Ref. 270 84 10





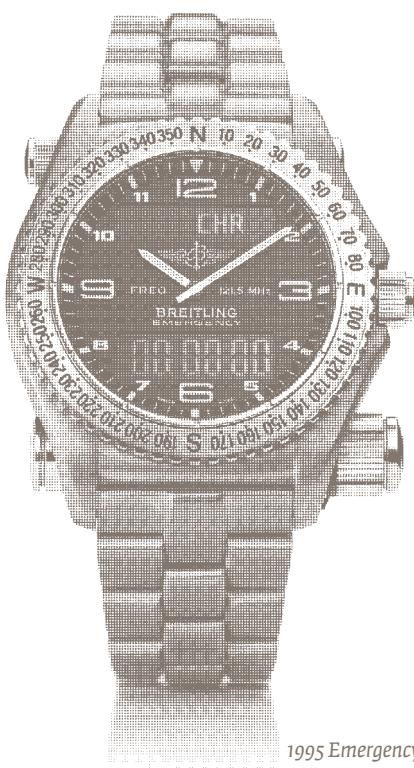
Breguet pocket watch  
N° 1188, sold in 1808

#### THE TOURBILLON BY BREGUET

"Abraham-Louis Breguet was undoubtedly one of the most amazing watchmakers of all time. In 1801, he invented the tourbillon, a device that made light of gravity. The heart of the watch rotated once a minute around its own axis, thus correcting what might call centre of gravity errors. In the 1980s, this principle developed for pocket watches was reintroduced for wristwatches and met with huge success. For historical reasons, the Breguet brand was thus predestined for the tourbillon. I often observe that this type of piece is passed on from father to son – a sure indication that tourbillon watches never lose their value."



Breguet Tourbillon  
5317BA/12/9V6



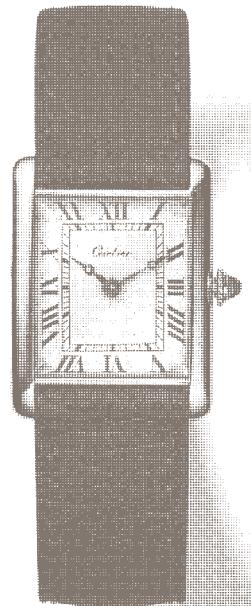
1995 Emergency watch



Emergency 2013

#### THE EMERGENCY BY BREITLING

"Breitling built its reputation on the Navitimer pilot's watch. In 1995, the brand launched the Emergency, which deserves a special mention. When we began presenting this watch, a private pilot from Alaska came to the boutique and said: 'That's the watch I'm looking for!' And he wasn't the only one. One can legitimately consider that Breitling played a pioneering role by equipping the Emergency with a built-in emergency signal transmitter. In the event of an emergency, you need to deploy an antenna. In addition to pilots, cross-country skiers and sailing enthusiasts swear by this model."



1925 Tank wristwatch



TANK 18 KT W1529756

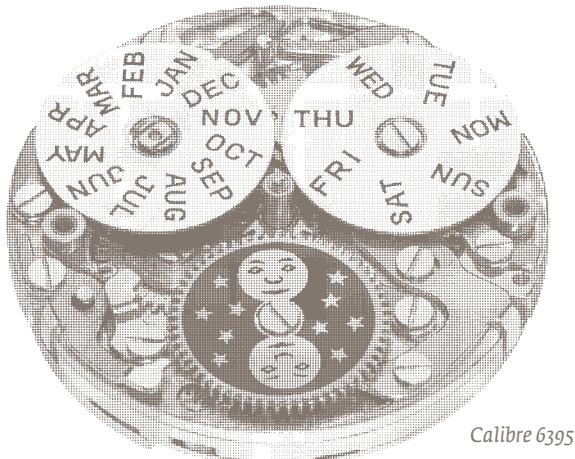
**THE TANK BY CARTIER**

“Cartier was one of the earliest partner brands of Les Ambassadeurs. Cartier’s Tank was quite simply part of an excellent collection. Louis Cartier (1875 – 1942) introduced this model for the first time in 1919 after a long period of development. The jeweller and designer’s objective was to give a perfect aesthetic shape to the wristwatch which was just becoming fashionable. Cartier’s idea was to combine the technical side of things with a formal modern style to make an exceptional piece of jewellery. Its external characteristic was the rectangular shape that broke away from traditional round stereotypes. Its form was inspired by the silhouette of the tanks used for the first time in the First World War which had just ended. That is how the watch got its name. Another characteristic was the butterfly clasp hidden on the leather strap. This watch has often been fitted with a dial featuring radiating Roman numerals.”

**THE PATRIMONY AUTOMATIC BY VACHERON CONSTANTIN**

“Vacheron Constantin appeals to aficionados by combining the highest standards with extremely small production volumes. It is all about the very soul of movements. Its timelessly elegant appearance radiates peerless understated elegance. Only a connoisseur will know what he is wearing on his arm. At a very early stage, Vacheron Constantin embraced the criteria laid down by the Poinçon de Genève (Hallmark of Geneva), an independent official label of quality establishing technical standards that must be met, notably with regard to the specific finish of ébauches (movement blanks). Assembly must be performed exclusively in Geneva. The Hallmark is an exclusive label that guarantees four invaluable properties in a watch: origin, extreme precision, longevity and horological expertise.”

Movement of the Patrimony  
watch engraved with  
the Hallmark of GenevaPatrimony  
81180/000G-9117



Calibre 6395

**THE MOON PHASE WATCH BY BLANCPAIN**

"When moon phase watches were fashionable 30 years ago, many brands made them. While not many have lasted, one of them is a Blancpain watch that has become a great classic: an authentic and enduring legend displaying the calendar, moon phases and leap years. Blancpain has opted to focus on just such precious details and reintroduced the traditional classic to the market, with a modern new look. Moreover, Blancpain produces watch movements that are amongst the thinnest and most complex in the world!"

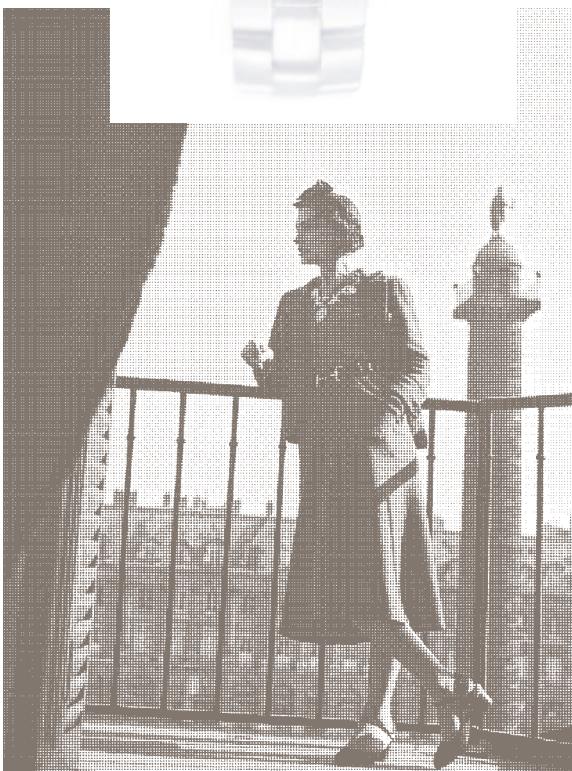


Villeret Complete moon phase calendar  
Single push-button chronograph – Ref. 6685-3642-55 B



White ceramic J12,  
Ref. H2570

Coco Chanel

**THE J12 BY CHANEL**

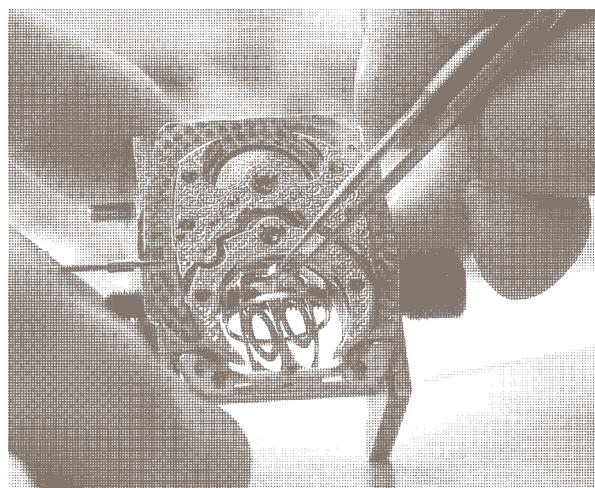
"Some time ago I attended an event organised by a watch brand. What struck me was that a third of the women present were wearing a Chanel watch on their wrists – which is not surprising given the watch. Chanel began to manufacture the J12 in 2000, the idea at the time being to create a sporty, elegant ceramic watch! The white version was added to the black version in 2003. The J12 is produced in Switzerland. It is designed for women of the world. Despite its youth, it is amongst my great classics."



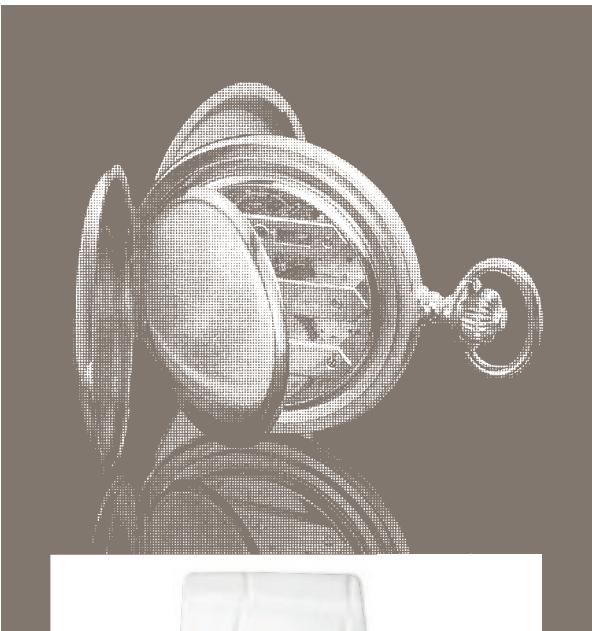
Cintré  
Curvex Classic,  
Ref. 8880 SC DT

#### CURVEX BY FRANCK MULLER

"The launch of an exceptional Curvex design in the 1980s came at exactly the right time. Franck Muller's watches became an overnight sensation. The best known amongst them are models with barrel or "tonneau" shaped cases giving them an aesthetically harmonious appearance. Franck Muller is distinguished by its precious dials. Like the dial, the glass is also convex. The perfect shape is sheer extravagance. We love showing off what we have."



Assembling the watch movement



Pocket-watch  
Tourbillon with  
Three Gold  
Bridges model,  
circa 1860



Cat's Eye – Ref. 8048  
4D52 A761-BK7A

#### CAT'S EYE BY GIRARD-PERREGAUX

"Whenever one mentions Girard-Perregaux, many people immediately think of the Tourbillon with Three Gold Bridges. But my opinion is that one should also pay particular attention to the Cat's Eye, one of the most beautiful ladies' watches on the market. The case is oval and positioned horizontally, as implied by the name of the watch. This is the perfect watch for a slim wrist. It can be very restrained, covered in diamonds or equipped with complications that will undoubtedly fascinate the women who wear it."

# Symbol of love

To mention only the most famous performers, Marilyn Monroe extolled its virtues and the same goes for Madonna and Kylie Minogue, Beyoncé and Rihanna. They have brought us timeless songs, from *Diamonds are a girl's best friend* to *Shine bright like a diamond*. And Sean Connery alias James Bond is not the only hero to have given diamonds a place in movie heritage thanks to the unforgettable film *Diamonds are forever*. Movie stars and musical greats enabled the most precious of all stones to experience an unprecedented rise in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to become the most moving of all gifts. Diamonds have become the symbol of a stable relationship. The fashion did not only start in the United States in musical form, but diamonds swiftly also became synonymous with marriage proposals in North America. Japan took over this tradition during the 1970s, and men in Switzerland in turn discovered that in the eyes of their beloved, a diamond ring represented a declaration of eternal trust and love. As the king of precious stones, the diamond with its unique aura became the number one symbol for lovers.

With "Diamonds of Excellence" Les Ambassadeurs meets extremely high standards with regard to this rare, much sought-after gem. Each stone is selected according to its beauty and its unique character in terms of clarity, carat weight or colour, expressed in all shapes and sizes. In particular, Les Ambassadeurs is the only jeweller in the whole world to whom the great English jeweller Graff entrusts its unique diamond creations outside of its own boutiques.

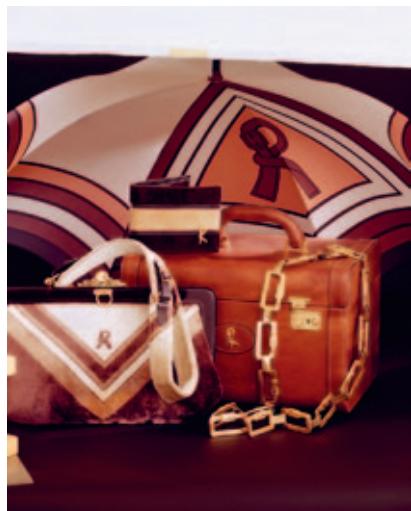
Marilyn Monroe



© Corbis/Dukas

# Once upon a time...

*Roberta di Camerino handbags*



*Roberta di Camerino apparel in the St. Moritz boutique*



**L**es Ambassadeurs was the cause of much talk during the 1970s, mostly because of the striking, avant-garde architecture of the Omega building in Zurich. Here, women and men of the world were able to choose from watches and jewellery as well as unusual accessories and exclusive clothes. Ladies came to purchase upmarket collections by Venetian creator Roberta di Camerino, and men the elegant British Dunhill line. For large-scale fashion shows aimed at hand-picked clients, the director of the fashion boutique Beatrice Dreher presented superb Italian Haute Couture. At the end of the 1980s, Les Ambassadeurs closed its Zurich fashion section in order to focus on watches and jewellery.



*Dunhill advice*



50  
1964 2014

# LES AMBASSADEURS

THE LEADING HOUSE OF LEADING NAMES

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