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BY SVEND ANDERSEN

WOMEN OF DISTINCTION

Women are becoming a force in watches, on both sides of the transaction. As more women purchase watches for themselves, they are becoming more important as consumers of fine watches. At the same time, women are gaining prominence in the watch industry, as presidents and vice presidents of watch companies and as retailers. To recognize some of the women who are shaping the industry, *InSync* presents the 2006 Women of Distinction Awards. The recipients are among the industry's brightest stars. We are honored to feature them here, speaking to the challenges facing their industry, its future and the nature of time itself.



Linda Passaro

Linda Passaro, general manager, Longines USA: “The watch business is good and growing. I think there’s a lot of potential in America. The US consumer is starting to understand the concept of watch wardrobing in fine watches. We see more coverage of watches in major fashion publications, and the concept of ownership across brands is really starting to become more of the trend in the US. As this takes hold, women will become a really important part of the growth.

“Women are looking for affordable fine Swiss watches in a wide range of styles. I also firmly believe that there will be growth in women’s automatics. We at Longines believe that we have to educate women about automatics, and perhaps romance them, in a way that the industry has not yet done. We need to captivate in describing how automatics feel and create an intimacy between the watch and the woman, as well as talking about tradition and history. I think women will gravitate

toward automatic watches if we take the time to explain them.

“I used to work for DeBeers, which promotes the right hand ring concept. Now I say, ‘Women, raise your left wrist.’ The watch industry has an opportunity to focus women on the watch as an integral part of her wardrobe and her reward to herself.

“I think that as the numbers of male and female watch consumers becomes more balanced, the top positions in the watch industry will reflect that. There will be more opportunities for women to take on senior leadership



Sue Rechner

roles in our industry.

“Time is precious, and there is never enough of it. We have to fill it with things that bring us joy. My favorite watch is the automatic Longines evidenza with diamonds. It’s the perfect everyday watch.”

Sue Rechner, president and CEO of Victorinox Swiss Army Watch Brands:

“Watches continue to be some of the most interesting and enduring accessories. The love affair with fine timepieces continues, for men and women alike. The industry is very healthy, and demand continues. The industry clearly defines the respective brands, and if we all stay focused on brand strategy and identity, we can continue to offer real choices, which will mean we will continue to grow. If we try to be all things to all people, we will lose out. There is room in the industry for companies who have clear focus.

“Certainly unisex, larger and more sophisticated timepieces are increasingly popular with women who are independent and have a self-assured sense of style. The way women have educated themselves regarding sophisticated timepieces shows in the strength of mechanical watch sales.

“The Internet poses a challenge for the industry. Our retailers make major investments in inventory, and the way Internet companies mislead people is dishonest. The training of associates will continue to be a major challenge. We focus on independents because they take the time to train their associates, which is critical for selling sophisticated watches. Distribution is also a challenge. Makers have to consider the long term when it comes to distribution—selling into the gray market may help them make their quarter, but it damages the industry in general. Lastly, there is a big need for skilled watchmakers. As timepieces with complicated movements become more popular, having trained watchmakers to

service them also becomes more important.

"For good or bad, I don't think the male domination of the watch industry will be coming to an end soon. Things are changing; the role of women in the industry is growing, especially in top positions. Women infuse a different kind of energy, intelligence and sensibility into the industry. It would be a positive thing if it were more balanced.

"It's not about time in your life, it's about life in your time. Really living life to the fullest, putting positive energy in the world during your time in the world. It's the quality of the time you have, not the quantity of time. If I had more time, I would take a vacation. I would go to Galapagos; I've always wanted to go there. I also want to do things where I can give back to the world in a positive way. I would say the 44mm Swiss Army Ambassador XL automatic is my favorite watch—it's got classic style and balance of proportion, and I really connect with it."



Nathalie Guedj

Nathalie Guedj, president and CEO, Van Cleef & Arpels America: "Today, too many brands are losing their focus on who they are and who their main customer is, trying to be all things to all people. It's the same for the jeweled watch—everybody is putting diamonds everywhere now. To be different, to stand out, is not easy. For Van Cleef & Arpels, we are lucky because we have a true style and identity. Each year, we

have brought unique designs to the market.

"American customers like watches, and they are good watch buyers. I believe the market will continue to increase. Clearly, the time is over when people have only one watch. Men, by nature, like collecting; the collecting mania is not a feminine thing, really. Men also love the technical aspects of



Stacie Orloff

the watches, and watch companies are geared towards the engine of the watch, so this is a man's world. I don't know if the high complication part of the women's watch market is going to stay, because it's far from women's minds. For women, the watch is a fashion accessory—that will not be going away. I see big success in the women's market, but not so much on the technical side.

"I think, in ten years, this will still be an industry run by men. Who cares? What we need and want is to have passionate, professional people in the industry.

"Time means business. Time means appointments and the need to be on time. It means schedule and professionalism. If I had more time, I would read at least two or three hours a day. Reading is my passion. My favorite watch is the Van Cleef & Arpels Pampille. When I wear this watch, women come up to me to find out what it is. It is so feminine."

Stacie Orloff, president, Corum USA: "The watch market in the US is still growing, especially in the luxury side of

the business. Watches are a dominant part of wardrobing and accessorizing for both men and women. It's not just about telling time anymore, a watch has become a must-have accessory.

"I am optimistic about the future of the industry. With strong demand and the increase in consumer education, people will keep pressing manufacturers for more technology, more uniqueness, new fashion trends, new luxury trends. As long as big brands like Coach and Hermès stay in the watch business, they will keep fashion customers aware of watches, paving the way for smaller niche brands. Corum produces extraordinary pieces in small quantities.

"There's much being made of women wanting mechanical watches and complications, but I don't think that's the case. I don't think women want to wind or set their watches every day. However, women's purchasing power is growing, and there are women in positions of power who want things of beauty and value, and they are pushing the envelope. At the end of the day, a woman wants a quality watch with cachet that is a statement on her wrist. Watch manufacturers are going to have to listen to women, because it's a powerful market.

"I am concerned about counterfeiting, which is wreaking havoc on the manufacturers. The Internet will continue to pose a challenge to our retailers who are spending hard-earned dollars to service customers properly, then lose out to Internet discounting. Consumers have to remember that it's not just about price. They are going to get the best service and a warranty that will be honored from an authorized retailer.

"Time is a luxury, and when I have time, I try to take it for myself. I enjoy my family, good friends, good wine. Time means being able to schedule a permanent weekly session with my personal trainer, talking to my mom every day, spending it with my kids and my husband and staying involved with the constant flow around me. I guess in the end, time is what helps us get up in the morning and work through the gyrations of the day and be happy about the choices we have made. The Corum Golden Bridge is my favorite watch. It's an unbelievable playful twist on a classic."

Marie Bodman, president, Breitling USA: "It's an exciting time for luxury brands. Over the past ten years, the American consumer has become much more sophisticated about luxury watches. I see the market continuing to grow.

"We are privileged to have a larger watch that women feel comfortable with. Women often come to Breitling through their husbands or boyfriends. Women now have more disposable income, and they want a functional watch. Women who are 40 and over, who have the money to buy a watch for themselves, can't read a small watch anymore. They no longer want a pretty little accessory; they want to read the time. Many also want different functions, like two time zones, and that means a bigger watch.



Marie Bodman

"I am certainly concerned about how to manage the Internet. It's a challenge to protect the integrity of the brand when the Internet is involved. There is so much false information and false advertising out there. Our watches need to be handled by retailers. There is an excitement to having a retailer serve you, put the watch on you, tell you about the watch—the experience can and should be really thrilling.

"More women are working and making a comfortable living. Statistics show that women are gaining strength as consumers. On the other hand, men love toys, and watches are like cars or boats, so

men will continue to drive the industry. I hope that more women come to power in the industry. However, I never see myself as a woman, but as a person—my hope is that we have competent people in the industry, regardless of whether they are women or men.

"To me, time is the best equalizer. We cannot buy time, we cannot steal time, we can waste time, but we all have to die, and ultimately that's the test. It's not that I don't have enough time, I just have to use it more wisely. I am doing what I want, although if I had more time, I would learn Chinese. I am fascinated by Asia.

"My next watch will be the Breitling Bentley Mark VI, a 42mm watch, which is very sexy."

Melissa Oster, co-owner, Oster

Jewelers: "For us, watches are booming. There has been a resurgence of interest in craftsmanship and fine mechanical movements in watches, and the quality is amazing in many brands. There is increased awareness and interest, and that translates into sales. We are doing well because Jeremy, my husband, is an expert in watches and well-known in the industry. People who appreciate luxury want to go into a store where they get great service, and we offer impeccable service. We are able to get the one-of-a-kind pieces and limited editions that collectors really want, and we are able to educate newcomers.

"I think the watch industry will continue to grow, and we will continue to attract new customers. Our business is referral-based. We do quite a bit of advertising, but word of mouth is the most effective.

"Women's watches are very popular. As men become more interested in mechanical watches, they want their women to wear mechanical watches. Women are also coming in and asking for watches with larger dials and mechanical movements. More diamonds on the bezel and colored stones are also hot. Women are becoming self purchasers more and more. At lower price levels, under a couple of thousand dollars, women are very strong customers. With the launch of new lines aimed at women, and even designed



Melissa Oster

by women, I think that companies are listening to women more than ever before.

"I worry about people buying on the Internet from unauthorized dealers, because they don't know what they are getting. The Internet poses a challenge, but it's also an intriguing tool.

"The boutiques that watch companies are opening up are also a challenge. On one hand, it's good because it's great exposure, but when allotment of product becomes tied up with the boutiques, independent jewelers don't get as much. Ultimately, that's compromising for the brand.

"My favorite watches are for travelers. I really enjoy the Ulysse Nardin GMT; I love Parmigiani Fleurier, the new Audemars Piguet watches, the new Bell & Ross BR-01 and the Anonimo Day/Date. The Queen of Naples from Breguet is incredible. I like a lot of watches, especially hand-wound mechanicals. I prefer them even to automatics.

"There is never enough time. I try to treasure my time, and I am very aware of it. If I had more, I would spend it with family. I would definitely relax more and travel more. And I'd enjoy opening a couple more stores."

Carol Levey, vice president of marketing and operations, Maurice Lacroix

NA: "There is a lot of growth opportunity in watches. Right now, the baby boomer generation is holding the wealth. They are the pure play purchasers; they want things

because they want to have fun. You've got people who have raised their children and are ready to invest in themselves again, so I feel good about the future, much better than I did even two years ago.

"The industry shoots itself in the foot when it targets only men. The group of women who will purchase watches is large, and it is going to continue to grow. Women are telling us that they make decisions based on design, then price, then brand—in that order. Women are looking for timepieces that suit their lifestyles. We have a lot to do as an industry to engage them, and the first thing will be education. We have to tell

Candy Udell, president and co-owner, London Jewelers: "The watch industry is healthy. There is strong demand for beautiful watches, especially in the high end. The trend for women's watches seems to be oversized. At the same time, color, diamonds and unique design are sought after. The retailer's challenge is always to find interesting products that are sexy, unique and limited in production.

I am concerned that some brands seem to be flooding the worldwide market with too much product, which creates problems for legitimate retailers who are trying to maintain the integrity of the brands. I am

is finally recognition for the segment, and that is good news for the industry. We are just starting to tap the fantastic potential of the US market, and there is so much room for growth. The only problem we face is production capacity.

"Women are now much more interested in purchasing watches. They are interested in knowing what the craft is about, and they will eventually turn to the traditional men's brands. Since 2004, Audemars Piguet has been developing women's watches with style, design and mechanical movements. Women are buying bigger watches, so there is more room



Carol Levey



Candy Udell



Alice Riese-Rolley

people how important watches are to legacies, memories and the future.

"I don't see myself as a woman in this industry. I see myself as a positive contributing member of this industry. I want exciting people to come into this industry to help it grow, make it stable and profitable.

"Time means so much more to me than it did 20 years ago. Every second of every day I spend on this earth, I feel that I have to make an impact, both for the people who helped me come into this life and for my children. If I had more time, I would spend it making phone calls and talking to people whom I haven't talked with for a long time. I'd also go back and throw snowballs with my Dad. My favorite watch is the Maurice Lacroix Jour et Nuit, because it represents the way time should be read."

concerned about gray market goods, Internet sales and illegitimate suppliers.

"I don't see the male domination of the watch industry coming to an end. There are only a small handful of powerful women in the watch industry. This is a tough nut to crack.

"The old expression is that time flies when you are having fun, and that is exactly how I feel. Family, friends and work are my passions. If I had more time, maybe I would sit back and smell the roses, but not now—there's still too much to accomplish!"

Alice Riese-Rolley, marketing director, Audemars Piguet NA: "The watch industry is doing better than ever. The high end of the industry is very strong right now. We have come to the critical point where there

for the movement, and they are interested in the function. They are even more interested in the romance of the notion of time. Traditional watchmakers are the guardians of the notion of time, so they stand to profit more than anyone else.

"I think the brands understand that if they want to move into women's watches, they have to promote women. I think there will be more women designing watches.

"Time is more important as the pace of life becomes faster and faster. A high-end watch reminds me of the importance of time. The greatest luxury in life is to be able to focus on the things that are important to you. My favorite watch is the Audemars Piguet Royal Oak Offshore Chronograph. I also like the Chanel J12. The Audemars Piguet Millenary line will also include a watch for women."