

STORY PIN LEE

FAMILY VALUES

Christoph Wellendorff, managing director of the German luxury jeweller, says the company philosophy ensures genuine quality

Wellendorff has been a relatively quiet brand in Hong Kong and mainland China. But, lately, there has been an effort to boost its profile. Why is this happening?

We already have well-established boutiques in Germany, North America and Japan. Hence, it makes sense for us to not only focus on the markets that we are already in, but to also open a little bit more in the Greater China market. Now we have a boutique in Beijing and two in Hong Kong.

Secondly, the behaviour of Chinese consumers is also changing. In the past, they were really into status and flashy brands, while we are more of a sophisticated, discreet brand. But an increasing number of Chinese consumers now understand the values of our brand and how our jewellery is made. They like that we take the finest in materials, people and skills, and we create the finest jewellery. This seems to appeal to them more and more.

What makes Wellendorff stand out from other jewellery brands?

Our family motto and company philosophy is *wahre werte*, which translates [from German] to "genuine values".

We make meaningful jewellery. We are a German brand based in Pforzheim, and we are known for precision, quality and durability. Every piece of Wellendorff jewellery and all its parts are created and handmade in our Pforzheim manufactory and it has to pass stringent quality checks before it receives the coveted seal of quality: a W

crowned with a diamond. We also tell our customers that they will get lifetime enjoyment because all our jewellery is guaranteed for life. On top of that, the value and intrinsic beauty of our jewellery are more than just design and craftsmanship. Most of our customers buy our jewellery to commemorate and celebrate something or someone, so there is an emotional dimension which extends beyond price.

Luxury goods are in a period of uncertainty, with antigraft measures in China, the impact of currency swings, and social upheaval in many parts of the world. Do you have a strategy to support sales under these conditions?

The anticorruption drive has not affected us, because people don't buy our jewellery for gifting purposes. In fact, most of our boutiques are doing well and recording growth. I believe husbands still want to buy jewellery for their wives because of love and affection, and successful career women want to buy it to reward themselves.

I see more people investing in things that last, such as art, jewellery and antiques, which may even appreciate in value in the future. As such, our jewellery appeals to these connoisseurs because they indicate the wearer appreciates the timelessness. Good and exciting innovations come because of love and emotions, and as long as these inspire us, we will continue to create jewellery that people will want regardless of the economic situation.

In a market that is dominated by luxury giants, how does Wellendorff keep its independence and still remain competitive?

Big conglomerates are driven by "quarterly" reports, while we do a "lifetime" report. Our report allows us to become long-term thinkers, and our customers can see that. That's why we attract people who don't follow the masses. As long as we make the finest jewellery, they will come to us and trust us.

The Wellendorff brand is now run by the fourth generation, and we thrive on tradition and family values. Both of my parents, my brother and his wife all work for Wellendorff. We strongly believe in family first, and we are firmly entrenched in the belief that the company should operate as independently as the previous three generations before us. Wellendorff is not for sale even though we have been approached.

What is your personal philosophy when it comes to work?

There's a saying: "Do what you love, and you never have to work again", because then your job is

not about working just to make a living. I'm passionate about my work, and I enjoy all aspects of it. Even on weekends, I'm just as happy to spend it with jewellery connoisseurs to talk about how to achieve your dreams, how to reward yourself. It's very exciting for me.

I am also a true believer in the power of positivity. In our brain there are two centres: one is positivity and the other is fear, and they fight all the time. A friend of mine gave me a book about positivity, and it says always try to be positive, because positive people tend to be more lucky as well. †

