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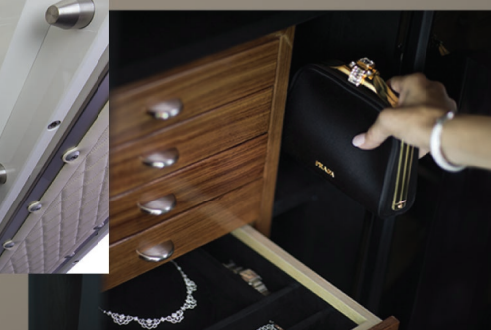


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> FRONT ROW

STORY SMITHA SADANANDAN

FIRST AMONG EQUALS

*Watchmakers and high jewellery houses are becoming catalysts
for change in the luxury industry by promoting gender
equality and inclusiveness*

*Chromatique brooch from
Boucheron's Holographique
collection. Photo: Boucheron*





Illustration: Bulgari



ABOVE
Hélène Poullit-Duquesne, CEO of Boucheron.
Photo: Boucheron

LEFT
Cartier Women's Initiative Impact Awards
Ceremony 2022. Photo: Cartier



Cartier Pixelage
necklace. Photo:
Cartier

ince the #MeToo watershed broke in 2015, the ripples of change have been felt across our social landscape, with long-overdue efforts to promote gender equality and empower women kick-started in almost every field, and the watch and jewellery industry has made its own collective response. Brands are today actively thinking beyond gender – not merely in terms of product design and user appeal, but also in workforce and talent incubation. The important players now understand that consumers are inclined to veer towards brands that are aligned with their personal values, and principles like inclusiveness and gender diversity often figure among those values.

The Cartier Women's Initiative annual entrepreneurship programme, founded in 2006, aimed to drive change by empowering female entrepreneurs. Sixteen years on, Cartier's initiative has supported at least 262 women worldwide, in sectors as diverse as pharmaceuticals, e-learning and agriculture. Besides this, the brand's recent partnership with Expo 2020 Dubai to unveil a Women's Pavilion marked another step forward. The pavilion "recognises and celebrates the role and achievements of women throughout history, sheds light on the challenges that women still face, and explores innovative solutions that are advancing progress around the world."



LEFT
Boucheron Prisme ring. Photo: Boucheron

ABOVE
One of Richard Mille's latest watches for women is the RM 037 Automatic White Ceramic. Photo: Richard Mille

In early March this year, Cartier Women's Initiative – as part of its 15th anniversary celebrations – brought together its global community of changemakers in Dubai to recognise their “remarkable achievements and collectively shape the future of the programme, looking back on its evolution and footprint”. It was a big positive, says Cyrille Vigneron, president and CEO of Cartier International. “During all these years, this initiative has brought together a community of passionate social entrepreneurs who have developed successful business models improving lives around them. This community is a constant source of awe and inspiration,” he says.

Ensuring equal career opportunities for women, especially opportunities to reach top executive level, is an important parameter of gender equality so it's inspiring to see a handful of women presiding over acclaimed luxury houses, from Victoire de Castellane, creative director of Dior Joaillerie to Catherine Renier, CEO of Jaeger-LeCoultre. By this measure, French jewellery maison Boucheron, owned by luxury conglomerate Kering, is a particularly promising place for women – headed by CEO H  l  ne Poulit-Duquesne, it has Claire Choisne as its creative director.

Within Boucheron, there is no position specifically intended for a man or a woman. “It is all about the individual. Our only criteria are talent and expertise, even at the highest level of the company,” says Poulit-Duquesne, whose executive committee includes more women

Our only criteria are talent and expertise, even at the highest level of the company **H  L  NE POULIT-DUQUESNE**

than men. “I did not select them based on gender to ensure parity, but on their individual skills. It is super important for me to have both sides of the world because that is what gives the best.”

Previously with LVMH, Poulit-Duquesne joined Cartier in 1998 and rose to international business and client development director and member of the executive committee of Cartier International, before being appointed as Boucheron CEO in 2015 at the age of 45.

“To me, jumping to grab opportunities, knowing the risks involved would make your existence unique. You should chase your dream, but you should also welcome and accept the unexpected in the middle of the path to your goal,” says Poulit-Duquesne.

The vision is infused into some of Boucheron's designs. The genderless collections offer jewellery wearers the freedom to express their personalities and style. “The important thing is to remain as free



LEFT
Lisa of K-pop girl band Blackpink is a Bulgari ambassador.
Photo: Bulgari



as possible in the design and think beyond gender.” The brand’s focus on a multiwear and genderless approach is reflected in the iconic Quatre and Jack, and high jewellery collections. “Creative director Claire Choisne and her team do not work on traditional sketches, but prefer to draw the jewels on portraits of women and men to better picture the piece worn, imagine the look and think about the multiwear options,” notes Poulit-Duquesne.

At Bulgari, more than 60 per cent of its managers worldwide are women, according to CEO Jean-Christophe Babin. Chief among them is Lucia Silvestri, creative director of the Italian jeweller since 2013.

Bulgari’s Women’s Empowerment Principles have been promoting gender equality in the workplace, as well as their marketplace and the wider community since 2013.

“We recognise a talented and diverse workforce as a key competitive advantage, leading to multifaceted innovation and creativity,” says Babin. “We firmly believe in their abilities, in their strength for which they are clearly superior to men, and they never forget to follow their dreams. Women have the incredible ability to remain concrete in their actions.”

Besides eliminating gender disparity in the workplace, the mission for some brands expands to resolving societal issues for women. As part of the initiatives supported by the Bulgari Virus Free Fund, the company has undertaken a collaboration with one of the world’s leading biomedical research institutions, the Rockefeller University, and established the Bulgari Women and Science Fellowship in Covid-19 research to support the brilliant and talented women scientists working on virus research at the American university.

“We offer women the opportunity to continue their postdoctoral education and conduct innovative research, while pursuing the global goal of achieving remission and cure of the Covid-19 virus. In the frame of female empowerment, we also introduced the Bulgari Aurora Awards, first in Japan and then since 2019, in China,” notes Babin.

We recognise a talented and diverse workforce as a key competitive advantage **JEAN-CHRISTOPHE BABIN**



The facade of the Women's Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai. Photo: Expo 2020 Dubai and Cartier



Pasha de Cartier watch, 30mm. Photo: Cartier



Richard Mille's 2021 all-women racing team, from left, Beitske Visser, Tatiana Calderón and Sophia Floersch. Photo: DPPI



Catherine Rénier, CEO of Jaeger-LeCoultre. Photo: Johann Sauty

Challenging norms is intrinsic to watchmaker Richard Mille, and the brand shook up male dominance on the racetrack by launching an all-women racing team in 2021. "Racing is one of my father's absolute passions, and it seemed a perfect idea to concentrate on something distinctly feminine, which broke the code," says Amanda Mille, brand and partnerships director of Richard Mille. There was no better way than to "bring together women competitors in one of the most staunchly male world to show people what they – what we, as women – could do".

There's no doubt that luxury brands, from jewellery maisons to watchmakers, are adding an empowered edge to their vision, through design and a strong focus on talent.

While much more can be done, given criticism in the industry about the need to drive change, cultivate ideas and encourage diverse perspectives in the workforce, there are signs of progress. Moreover, developing cultural, linguistic and national diversity within organisations not only provides valuable insights into complex international markets, but also fosters an enriching variety of intercultural experiences, skills and understanding. +