



Guess What?

Trading in the green pastures of Connecticut for the Swiss Alps, Gc (Guess Collection) has just launched their first lines of Swiss-made watches.

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By Ellen Boonstra

An interesting history precedes the launch of Gc as a Swiss-made brand. First there were the immensely popular all-American Guess watches, which have been synonymous with fashion at affordable prices since 1984. Next, six years later, came Guess Collection (Gc), their up-market sister brand, targeted at young professionals looking for a more 'serious' watch. But as markets and consumer demands changed, the time was ripe for a more sophisticated watch. So Callanen International, the American corporation which licenses both brands, decided to transform Gc into a truly Swiss-made watch brand. A new company – Sequel Inc. – was set up, and its headquarters was established in Zug, Switzerland.

Fortunately Cindy Livingston, the President and CEO of Sequel, like many Americans, always wanted to live in Europe and was quite happy to relocate to the fine watch-making capital of the world. "I have a great job and career that I really

love," she told 2magazine during a short visit to Bangkok. "I got to start their international business and so I've been able to travel all over the world and there's nothing better than that."

Livingston realizes the importance of being in a central location. "If you're an international company you should be available to people and the customers you deal with. I don't think that many American companies do this well. And by us moving to Switzerland, it picks up a whole six hours everywhere," she says, adding that "It's a longer day though, because nobody ever stops talking to me!"

While Gc is currently the fastest growing part of Sequel's international sales, Guess watches remain as popular as ever, with worldwide sales to the young and hip hovering at around five or six million watches or so a year. Guess churns out new styles and collections with such lightning speed that it's a real challenge for those poor, hardworking Asian



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counterfeiters to keep up (more about this later). Who hasn't at some point in their lives – most likely in our teens or early twenties – owned a Guess watch?

As a generation of inexpensive watch wearers grew up, Gc burst onto the scene. Launched in 1990 by Paul Marciano, one of the founders of Guess Watches, Gc comprises an extensive range of fine, premium quality watches aimed at the loyal following of Guess watch wearers.

"We had all these customers who started growing up, entering the workplace, and they wanted a better watch. They trusted us because we've always had, and still have, a great sense of fashion and know what young adults want," says Livingston. "There are a lot of people who can't afford a Bulgari or Gucci... We decided to create a watch our customers could transition into – a little more classic, still elegant... not necessarily big, trendy watches - in pink, yellow or green."

While Guess watches are mass produced in China, Gc timepieces are painstakingly assembled in Switzerland by the same craftsmen who produce the movements for some of the world's best known luxury watch brands. Good news for consumers is that Gc retails at a fraction of the price compared to many of the high-end brands.

At the recently held Basel Watch Fair, international distributors snapped up all 2,000 pieces of a special limited edition Gc Automatic watch on the first day. "When people saw this watch for the 33,900 baht or 1,200 US\$ that it retails for, they went 'Oh my god, you can do that for 1,200 dollars!? This watch in somebody else's line would retail for 3,500 dollars!'" says Livingston, who is convinced top-quality watches need not cost you a 'wrist' and a leg. "It is possible. It's a mentality – how much you choose to spend on advertising and marketing," contending that "we could've sold more, but we couldn't even get the movements – that's how competitive the Swiss market is!"

The 33,900 baht price tag applies to this particular limited edition only. Regular prices of Gc retail anywhere between 8,000 and 30,000 baht, an attractive 'bridge price point' between the inexpensive and luxury market segments.

She says Gc's strength is being in tune with what their clients want. "Our customers, who were into fashion all those years, still want to be noticed, but they want it to be with a basic traditional piece. And that's the thought process that goes into our design... it has to have a bit of an edge to it."

As technology developed and the company's products became more sophisticated, the watch brand moved away from brass, to steel and other materials. So we take it that Guess watches are not collector's items? "Well, they are at my house!" Livingston laughs. "They were fun but they were for really young people. The industry has started using a lot of new materials. You just don't see basic steel metal watches anymore. We're doing a lot of new combinations... which is much more interesting."

With its elegant, European-inspired designs and competitive prices, Gc is certain to appeal to "the high-end market – the 26 to 35 group – of young executives and successful professionals" which the company is targeting. This season for example, 'SE-1', a men's automatic watch utilizing black IP plating with rose-gold trim, is set to become a runaway hit.

The use of rose-gold in watches and jewelry is currently a hot fashion trend, first sparked by Hublot. Besides watches, Gc is launching a series of matching items such as cufflinks and ID bracelets as Sequel has expanded their portfolio with two more licenses: Guess jewelry and Gc jewelry. "By being able to marry the jewelry and the watches together we'll be able to design them in conjunction with each other, something other licensed brands won't be able to do," Livingston says.

She confesses that there was a time in her life where she spent 20% of her time worrying about counterfeiting. "And then we hit a patch when it [Guess] wasn't so hot and nobody copied us!" she laughingly recounts. "So now I've decided that I prefer to see the products being copied because I know they're desirable and everybody wants them." Nowadays, this CEO says she gets much more upset when she finds fake Gc products, because the originals take a much longer to develop and stay in the line for a longer period of time.

Oh well, you win some and you lose some...