

# Maximum Sparkle, With No Apologies

By LIBBY BANKS FEB. 20, 2017

LONDON — Modest minimalism might be the prevailing trend in haute horology, but at least one company didn't get the memo.

Backes & Strauss has [a reputation](#) for unapologetically bold diamond-set timepieces — and there is no plan to change course, the company's chief executive, Vartkess Knadjian, said. That determination was evident as the house introduced its 2017 collection at the World Presentation of Haute Horlogerie in Geneva last month. "People joked that there were more diamonds on show at our stand than at all the stands at S.I.H.H.," Mr. Knadjian said, referring to the Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie, held at the same time.

Established in 1789, the company originally polished diamonds for clients like Cartier, Boucheron and Bulgari. But in 2006, Mr. Knadjian arranged a partnership with the Swiss watchmaker Franck Muller. "We are not watch purists," Mr. Knadjian said. "Our aim is always to create the ultimate diamond jewelry watch, so we always start with the diamonds."



The Piccadilly Renaissance Diamond Heart, with a total 5.56 carats of diamonds, by Backes & Strauss.

That is clear from the new Piccadilly Renaissance Diamond Heart, for example, which contains 188 round diamonds and 36 heart-shaped diamonds, totaling 5.56 carats.

Another new timepiece, the Lady Victoria Diamond, features a bejeweled bracelet, with 5.64 carats of diamonds and a petite 14-millimeter dial.

Smaller styles are favored by Asian women, particularly in Japan, Mr. Knadjian said, and Japan accounts for 23 percent of all Backes & Strauss sales. The house produces only about 1,000 watches a year, and the majority incorporate bespoke elements. Complex pieces can take as long as 2,600 hours to complete in its Geneva workshop.

Mr. Knadjian remains unmoved by wider industry trends.

"Watch brands used to take diamonds and slap them on their watches just to add value, but because of the industry slowdown, they've gone back to their roots," he said. "But for a specialist like us, it's an entirely different proposition."

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