

## America's #1 Address for Fine Watches and Jewelry



An Interview with Ruediger Albers, President, American Wempe Corp.

**EDITORS' NOTE** Ruediger Albers began his association with Wempe in 1987 as a master watchmaker and sales professional at Wempe Jewelers in Hamburg. He transferred to New York in 1988, and in 1991, he was appointed General Manager of American Wempe Corporation. Albers was promoted to Vice President in 1992 and assumed his current position in 2002.



Ruediger Albers

**COMPANY BRIEF** Founded in 1878 and headquartered in Hamburg, Germany, Wempe ([wempe.com](http://wempe.com)) is a purveyor of luxury timepieces and jewelry, with 32 stores in seven countries and aboard the cruise ships MS Europa and MS Europa II. In 1980, the company established New York-based American Wempe Corporation, whose flagship store on Fifth Avenue sells many of the world's most prestigious watch brands and fine jewelry.

**Wempe has made a major investment in its Fifth Avenue store, doubling its footprint after 12 months of renovation and expansion. Would you provide an overview of the expanded store and what clients should expect from the "new" Wempe?**

Fifth Avenue continues to be the place to be and we seized the opportunity to secure one of the very best corners for the next generation of Wempe family members as well as our dedicated staff. We doubled the size and with over 100 feet of frontage are now occupying half a city block. Our Hamburg architect, Anna Nicolas, after extensive research, was able to incorporate the building's rich 111-year history into our new design concept.

**How will the different brands you work with be positioned in the renovated store?**

The expanded store will be anchored by a Rolex Boutique on one side and a Patek Philippe showroom on the other.

The entrance has been moved to the center, creating perfect symmetry. A fresh new look with rich materials, heightened ceilings, open spaces, and our signature red carpet is awaiting our customers. We created unique wall and column displays throughout the store, which allows brands to be easily identified without the store having to sacrifice the homogeneous look. We had built an actual 3D-model at the very beginning to present the concept to the brands in individual meetings. The reaction was immediately positive and the result after 12 months of construction has exceeded

even my expectations. This store is like no other.

**Jewelry will have a strong presence and positioning as part of the store expansion. Would you highlight Wempe's strength in jewelry and how you plan to shine a brighter light on this part of your business?**

The expansion allows us to showcase our jewelry in a specially created new environment. The moment you enter the new store, our jewelry is literally front and center and we can finally showcase our abilities. Wempe owns its

very own atelier in Germany where master craftsmen not only create artful masterpieces and modern classics, but also will give customers' heirloom pieces a fresh new look.



Examples of Wempe's exquisite jewelry line

**Are you happy with the selection of brands that Wempe offers today and do you see any changes when it comes to the brand offerings?**

Wempe has curated the best brands for our customers in every category. Our selection process takes many aspects into account. Longevity and international service availability is of great importance since Wempe operates in seven countries.

**Wempe has achieved strong growth year over year. What is your outlook for the business in 2017?**

This year has been filled with challenges. In February, we moved into a temporary space adjacent to the original store, and went from five display windows at a prominent Fifth Avenue corner down to just two. Add Brexit and a decline in Chinese tourists and one would think it's a perfect storm. Fortunately, we were able to increase sales with domestic customers. For 2017, we are

definitely very positive that this major investment will yield significant sales increases.

**Customer service has been a key focus for Wempe. How have you been able to lead in this area?**

Our expansion allowed us to devote even more space to our service department, the backbone of our success.

We worked closely with our major partners to implement international service workspace standards, and invested in necessary high-tech equipment to improve diagnostics and thereby turnaround times. Our very talented and experienced master watchmakers are attending all available trainings at various manufacturers, which has earned us valuable certifications and thereby access to spare parts.

**Wempe has been very successful at retaining top talent. How important has this been to your success and your client relationships?**

At Wempe, we strive to offer an exceptional customer experience to every client. I'm looking for team players with a warm, friendly, caring personality, a natural smile, and a good sense of humor. Happiness not only comes from proper compensation but compassion, respect, and predictability. Mr. Wempe makes it a point to call and congratulate team members on long-service anniversaries or milestone birthdays. With over 700 employees worldwide, that is even more remarkable.

**What are your key priorities for Wempe as you look to the coming year?**

Wempe New York is the company's flagship and all our efforts will be directed towards cementing our leadership position as the number-one address for fine watches and jewelry in America. We will be investing in social media, a new ad campaign for digital and print media, as well as events, supported by our new PR agency BPCM.

**Your time is pulled in a number of different directions. How do you define your role and focus your efforts leading the brand?**

In 2017, I will have been with Wempe for 30 years. The only thing that hasn't changed during all those years is the position of my office. It continues to be right in the middle of the store, which makes me very accessible to clients and my team as well. The expansion project has consumed a lot of energy but all efforts and the attention to detail during the planning and execution was key to creating a store that is as impressive as it is functional. Going forward, I will spend more time meeting our clients, finding out what makes them tick, so we continuously exceed their expectations. ●