

Alessandro Amato, general manager of Sodo Migliori, had the courage and the inspiration to turn his passion for luxury jewels and watches into a business in a moment when Romanians knew almost nothing about this area. The Italian partnered Marian Mihart in the '90s and brought half of millenium old Cellini brand in Romania at a time when the competition was almost inexistent. The company plans to open next year four stores in Bucharest under a new brand for youth, including jewels made of silver and of other materials than gold.

BH: What is Sodo Migliori's expansion strategy in 2009, considering that in 2008 you opened stores in Timisoara, Cluj and Constanta?

Alessandro Amato: The global economic-financial conjuncture is not the best at this moment. Romania witnessed the effects later than other countries and the impact was not as dramatic as in the United States of America, Italy, Spain or Germany. We will not open more store countrywide in 2009, but we will follow a consolidation policy. We will focus more on the quality of the services offered to our customers as well as on staff training. Next year we will open one or two sales points in Bucharest.

BH: Have you already found the locations?

Alessandro Amato: Yes, we will open stores inside Cotroceni Park mall and inside Cocor shopping center.

BH: Do you prefer to open stores in high street locations or inside shopping center?

Alessandro Amato: The next 4 to 5 years will favor the shopping center development in Romania. The centers of large cities in Romania were not conceived for retail areas. During the communist regime there was no interest for the development of a commercial area in each city center. Right now it is much easier to buy land and start the development of a shopping center which can be conceived as a retail town. But this can not replace the presence of a shopping area on the most important street of a city. In Bucharest there are retail areas such as the city center, Calea Dorobanti, Blvd. Magheru and Calea Victoriei, but there are not such areas in all the other cities. Right now we are waiting for the settlement of a street or of a retail area, where the most important brands will place their stores, in the cities which we are targeting for expansion. I prefer a standalone store, to a store inside a shopping center. It is true that our stores inside the malls register the highest customer traffic, but there are three times more chances for a customer who enters a high street store to become a buyer.

BH: What were the reasons that led you to the launch of a new brand stores including jewels of silver and other materials than gold for the youth?

Alessandro Amato: The market is evolving, which means that the products focus on more specifique niches. If when we set up our business in Romania the demand was exclusively oriented towards gold jewellery and the jewels were assesed according to their weight, in time the evaluation system has evolved and the tastes have changed. Customers have started to

pay more attention to design, brand, stones and way of presentation. The youth have tastes completely different from the tastes of adults, who prefer classic gold jewels with diamonds or other precious stones. Young people look for design and materials that are resistant to sports and blows.

BH: What are the most targeted precious stones?

Alessandro Amato: The diamond has always been the most targeted stone, due to its optical properties and to its resistance in time. If we are considering only the value, the diamond is followed by emerald, ruby and safir.

BH: Do customers look for big or for precious stones?

Alessandro Amato: It depends on the client. A middle level client does not have knowledge about cuts or inclusions. The size is the most noticeable feature. Color comes second, followed by purity and cut. Clients usually chose a larger stone, to a smaller stone with better properties.

BH: How many stores will open under the new youth brand?

Alessandro Amato: We will open 4 stores in Bucharest for the beginning.

BH: What are the best selling watch brands?

Alessandro Amato: We also own Chronotime in partnership with Ion Schiau, a company that deals with watch distribution in Romania. The most numerous sold watches are Swatch branded, followed by Tissot watches. The most expensive watch we sold was a Breguet and its price exceeded a lot 100.000 Euro.

BH: What were the reasons that led you to the partnership with Swarovski?

Alessandro Amato: I have always had a wickness for these crystals that my grandmother used to collect when I was little. I contacted Swarowksi in 1998 for the partnership. It is a company with fantastic dynamics. They managed to change completely the crystal concept and they turned it into a piece of jewellery.

BH: Why did you chose to start a business with luxury watches and jewels?

Alessandro Amato: It has to do with passion. I have always liked the jewellery and the watches. My grandfather was a jeweler in Curacao. I met Marian Mihart, my partner, without whom I could have not started this business in Romania. The knowledge about luxury watches and jewels was very low in Romania during the '90s. But the people were willing to acquire new products. The style and the tastes have radically changed for the better in time.