PARADISE FOUND

DESPITE NARY A SWISS WATCH ON OFFER, THIS "OUT-OF-THE-WAY" RETAILER SAYS BUSINESS IS BOOMING, BOTH DOMESTICALLY AND BEYOND.

STORY BY **BANI McSPEDDEN** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **JASON SMITH**

AT A TIME WHEN WATCH businesses worldwide, brands and retailers alike, are hurriedly seeking ways to lift online sales, one Australian vendor is showing how it's done.

Online sales typically account for as little as 5 per cent of new watch purchases, but at Define Watches it's 60 per cent, due to a hybrid business model adopted by owners Peter Petzold and his wife Lydia Dalle Nogare when they opened 10 years ago.

"That 60 per cent went up to 90 per cent during COVID-19," Petzold says. Define Watches is based in Noosa, on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, and specialises in non-Swiss timepieces, brands with names many people have never heard of – but which have caught the attention of enthusiasts both here and abroad.

"We've grown steadily every year thanks to a very personal service that builds a relationship," Petzold tells *Watch*. Then there's the strategy that separates his business from others. "Our idea was to promote independent watchmakers I'd known previously as a supplier to brands."

This a reference to Petzold's previous business in Germany specialising in printing collateral, such as press releases, for the likes of Omega, IWC and Breguet. As Dalle Nogare explains: "When we relocated in 2009, we were surprised to learn that little was available in Australia outside the mainstream brands. Initially, we had an enormous task educating people about the existence of such brands. Internet shopping was only just beginning, but we knew this would take off quickly given the early-adopter culture of Australian retail."

Peter Petzold and Lydia Dalle Nogare.

Clockwise from far left: Benzinger Regulator; Tutima Saxon One; Armin Strom Pure Resonance; Habring2 Doppel Felix Tachy; Lang & Heyne Moritz.

Define – "because we wanted to define a new market, bringing something new to Australia" – opened in Brisbane, its focus on predominantly German makes, such as Benzinger and Dornblüth & Sohn, with an emphasis on small production runs and exclusivity, "as well as amazing value for money and top quality".

The move to Noosa four years ago was "a lifestyle decision" – and yes, it's brought with it some local celebrity clients. Petzold: "We're a little out of the way – not on Hastings Street. I've been embarrassed a few times, thinking 'I know that face from somewhere' … I don't think they'd like me saying who it was." Such discretion is not the norm in the watch world, but as Dalle Nogare explains, "We have an exceptionally high number of repeat clients – for which we are grateful as we really enjoy this personal and trusting aspect of our business."

That said, what's on offer is what brought the initial interest. "Over the years we've attempted to put together collections that appeal to a wide spectrum of tastes, budgets and styles," says . "The brands we represent are slightly off piste but definitely not short-lived trends. Brands such as Mühle-Glashütte, which has been around for more than 150 years, and the likes of Sinn, Habring², or Lang & Heyne are well-known and highly respected within watch circles."

Watches range in price from $1000 to $500,000; the highest online sale to date being a $500,000 Armin Strom timepiece sold earlier this year. Petzold:

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"Armin Strom, Lang & Heyne, and Moritz Grossmann are special, but I also get very excited when I see a new Hanhart or Tutima." Most sales are between $4000 and $70,000.

As for being "out of the way" in Noosa, all the signs are the move was prescient. "Our market and client base has expanded and Sydneysiders and Melburnians as well as numerous Kiwis joke that we are closer to them here in this getaway destination that avoids the big cities," says Dalle Nogare. "The destination concept has served us well and dovetails nicely with our unique offering."

With service just as important as the watch, they have set up an Australian service centre "to ensure all watches can be a well taken care of during their life without clients needing to pay a small ransom or wait months on end". If that sounds like a dream, it's one that, for Petzold and Dalle Nogare, has turned "into a flourishing and rewarding service" – and something of a Down Under standard-bearer. ●