

Press Release

Glashütte, July 2024

Walter Lange on his 100th birthday

Memories of the Founder of Lange Uhren GmbH

Walter Lange would have turned 100 years old on 29 July 2024. By reestablishing Lange Uhren GmbH on 7 December 1990, he not only succeeded in reviving his family's extensive watchmaking tradition after being forced to stop for over 40 years but also paved the way for the resurgence of Saxon precision watchmaking founded by his great-grandfather in 1845.



Walter Lange (29 July 1924 – 17 January 2017)

Walter Lange, who was closely connected with A. Lange & Söhne as a representative and ambassador until his death on 17 January 2017, was honoured many times over for his outstanding services to the Glashütte watch industry. Despite his success, he will always be remembered for his charismatic personality, open-mindedness, warmth, modesty and down-to-earth attitude. When Walter Lange approached others, he would always treat them as equals. With his vision of responsible entrepreneurship and his commitment to the trade, for example, to the next generation of watchmakers, his influence still characterises the corporate culture of A. Lange & Söhne today.

A Sheltered Childhood and the Cruelties of War

Born in Dresden in 1924, Walter Lange was the fourth child of Rudolf and Hildegart Lange and spent a sheltered childhood in Glashütte, which was influenced by the effects of the global economic crisis. The sight of the unemployed in front of the company's headquarters was etched deep into his memory - and later became the driving force behind his actions. There was no doubt in his mind that Walter Lange would become a watchmaker. He often accompanied his father Rudolf to the manufacture to inspect the finished chronometers. After completing primary school in Glashütte and his secondary education in Dresden, in the spring of 1941 he began an apprenticeship as a watchmaker in Karlstein, Lower Austria, at the School of the Watchmaking Industry. Just one year later, in the summer of 1942, there was a sudden interruption: at the age of 18, Walter Lange was called for military service in the Second World War. As he always emphasised, the only reason he survived was because of sheer luck. On 7 May 1945, he returned home severely wounded. But his luck was short-lived: Glashütte was bombed on the last day of the war, on 8 May 1945. The "shipyard", as the main production building of A. Lange & Söhne was also called, was badly damaged. What remained was seized by the Soviet occupiers. These included watches, components and machines as well as intellectual property, such as detailed documentation of the production of the Lange marine chronometer, which Walter Lange had to produce himself.

New Hope After the War - The First Wristwatch

The people of Glashütte immediately set about rebuilding the town. "We had no other choice," explains Walter Lange in his memoirs, "When Time Came Home", which have now been updated and expanded on to commemorate his 100th birthday. "Watch production was the only way we and our town could survive." After much debate within the family, sales of the "Calibre 28" began in 1947, a wristwatch movement based on the Calibre 48 pocket watch that had been produced up until that point. But as early as 1948, the expropriation and transformation into a state-owned company (VEB) by order of the SED regime ruined the Lange family's plans for the future. After being forced to work in uranium mining, Walter Lange fled to Pforzheim in November 1948, where his efforts to set up a new watchmaking manufacture were not very successful. Walter Lange remained loyal to the watchmaking and jewellery industry as a sales representative until his retirement in 1986. He always hoped that he could bring Lange back to life in Glashütte - but he never believed he would.

"We Had to Start from Scratch Once Again"

When the historic opportunity presented itself as a result of German reunification, Walter Lange did not hesitate. "7 December 1990 was one of the most important days of my life," he said in an interview on his 90th birthday. At the age of 66, he registered Lange Uhren GmbH, "using a postal address I had borrowed from a former classmate". Despite the risk, the family tradition demanded that he return to Glashütte "to give people here work and prospects during difficult times." The unwavering vision he had of bringing A. Lange & Söhne back to life was so powerful that it took four years to come to fruition in spite of all the obstacles.



Walter Lange and Günter Blümlein in the assembly department in the building Lange I, 1994

Walter Lange's most important sparring partner was the entrepreneur Günter Blümlein (1943–2001), a charismatic strategist who also firmly believed that a comeback of the historic brand was possible. With a small, dedicated team of designers, watchmakers and administrative staff, as well as financial support from VDO and LMH (Les Manufactures Horlogères), a convincing answer was finally provided to the question of what a Lange watch should look like at the end of the 20th century. "From the outset, it was important that we develop watches with a simple, classic design and an extremely modern look," said Walter Lange.

When Time Came Home

With a keen eye for quality, Lange and Blümlein, a dynamic duo, focused on preserving traditional craftsmanship and developing technical innovations. The first collection with LANGE 1, ARKADE, SAXONIA and TOURBILLON "Pour le Mérite" was launched on 24 October 1994 in the Dresden Royal Palace: Experts and connoisseurs were immediately impressed. The 123 examples produced were all sold. Many product presentations followed, and Walter Lange never hesitated to share his advice and experience. Until the very end, he would speak to customers, press representatives and business partners, giving interviews and talking about his life. He always engaged with everyone with a great deal of openness, even in Glashütte, where he was a welcomed guest.

Committed to the Next Generation of Watchmakers

One of Walter Lange's main concerns was the future of the watchmaking profession. At first, the company started in 1997 with just two trainees, and today the in-house school is internationally recognised. Walter Lange would always listen to the concerns of the next generation of watchmakers and with his involvement he is still a role model for the younger generation today. In autumn 2022, the manufacture paid tribute to its namesake by naming its in-house school the "Walter Lange Training and Further Education Centre".



Wilhelm Schmid at the naming ceremony of the Walter Lange Training and Further Education Centre, in October 2022

Give Credit Where Credit is Due

Walter Lange received as many as ten personal honours during his lifetime, including international awards such as the Prix Spécial du Jury du Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève in 2014, the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Fondation de la Haute Horlogerie in 2013 – both in Geneva – and the Caesars Award in Bucharest in 2011. To mark the 175th anniversary of Glashütte watchmaking, the town and A. Lange & Söhne subsequently honoured Walter Lange's life's work. A life-size bronze sculpture created by Hamburg artist Thomas Jastram was unveiled on 18 September 2020 in front of guests from the world of politics, people from the industry and the press – just a few steps away from the monument to his great-grandfather Ferdinand Adolph Lange. Other official honours include honorary citizenship of the town of Glashütte in 1995, the Saxon Order of Merit in 1998 and the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany 1st class in 2015.

"He Was the Beating Heart of our Manufacture."

With these words, Wilhelm Schmid remembers Walter Lange. His legacy should also be preserved in the future. "Walter Lange represented the old school in the truest sense of the word. He has brought his values, such as watchmaking, his down-to-earth attitude and his humble character to the company and firmly anchored them so that his way of thinking and his actions will continue to have an impact and guide our decisions as a company in the future," says the Lange CEO.

About A. Lange & Söhne

Dresden watchmaker Ferdinand Adolph Lange laid the foundations for Saxony's precision watchmaking industry when he established his manufacture in 1845. His precious pocket watches remain highly coveted among collectors all over the world. The company was expropriated after World War II, and the name A. Lange & Söhne nearly vanished. In 1990, Ferdinand Adolph Lange's great-grandson, Walter Lange, had the courage to relaunch the brand. Today, Lange crafts only a few thousand wristwatches per year, predominantly in gold or platinum. They are equipped exclusively with movements made in-house that are elaborately finished and assembled twice by hand. With 72 manufacture calibres developed since 1990, A. Lange & Söhne has secured a top-tier position in the world of watchmaking. Its greatest achievements include the LANGE 1, the first regularly produced wristwatch with an outsize date, and the ZEITWERK, with its precisely jumping numerals. Extraordinary complications such as the ZEITWERK MINUTE REPEATER, the TRIPLE SPLIT and the GRAND COMPLICATION presented in 2013, the most complicated model to date, represent what the manufacture always strives for: to drive the traditional art of watchmaking to ever-new heights. Launched in 2019, the sporty-elegant ODYSSEUS marked the beginning of a new chapter for A. Lange & Söhne.

Press enquiries

Arnd Einhorn, Head of Global Corporate Communications & Product PR
Tel.: +49 (0) 35053 440 | Email: presse@lange-soehne.com

Online information

alange-soehne.com | facebook.com/langesoehne | youtube.com/user/alangesoehne
instagram.com/alangesoehne | [#alangesoehne](https://twitter.com/alangesoehne)

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