

At 11, already making a name for herself in watches

A Geneva schoolgirl has spent the last year charming the industry with her online opinions about timepieces

GENEVA

BY VIVIAN MORELLI

She loves colorful high-top Nike sneakers and shopping sprees at Bershka, the fast-fashion retailer. She listens to the Belgian hip-hop artist Stromae and likes to drink Stracciatella Frappuccinos, a specialty at Starbucks in Switzerland. Amandine is just a regular 11-year-old growing up here — except she has become quite well-known in the watch industry thanks to her passion for timepieces and her candid social media comments about them. (She is identified only by her first name in public and in online posts, an arrangement her parents said was for her safety.)

In the year since it was created, @watch_it_with_amandine, her Instagram account, has accumulated nearly 2,000 followers, including well-known names like the vintage watch dealer Zoe Abelson and the collector Mark Cho. Her posts, in French, usually start with “Salut les amis...” (In English, “Hello, friends...”) and she goes on to talk about a watch or to give a glimpse of her daily life.

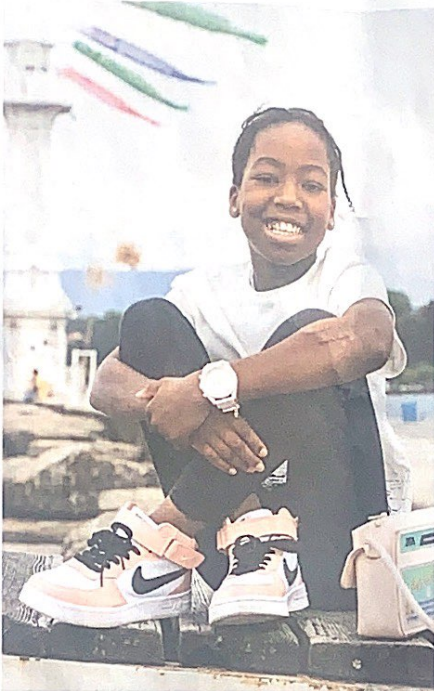
Her number of followers jumped in March 2022 when the auction house Phillips posted a YouTube video with Amandine doing a guest review of some watches it had scheduled for sale — hosted by Aurel Bacs, the well-known auctioneer who runs Phillips’s watch business, and with off-camera comments from Arthur Dubouché, Phillips’s head of digital strategy. (She loved the Harry Winston and P. Journe Opus 1 Chronomètre à Résonance, but said the Ming x Massena LAB “Honeytrap” “feels a little simplistic.”)

Since then, she has been interviewed by online sites like the Hong Kong-based Wristcheck, had one of her IG posts praised by Watchnista and has done some interviews of her own, like a recent one with Pierre Jacques, chief executive of De Bethune for the *Journal Suisse d’Horlogerie* magazine. “Amandine is a breath of fresh air,” Mr. Jacques wrote in an email, “a refreshing, uninhibited and wondering look at contemporary watchmaking, yet without taking herself too seriously. It does us so much good!”

Amandine said that her budding celebrity has been a bit of a surprise. “It happened all of a sudden, like a storm,” she said. “I just fell on me, but I like it a lot.”

In Geneva, children are surrounded by the watch industry: a parent or relative or neighbor — or sometimes all three — may have jobs in the field. (In Amandine’s case, her father spent 20 years managing sales or business development for watch media like *Revolution* and *WorldTempus*; he now works in outdoor advertising sales.) Their parents or school may take them to some of the scores of exhibitions and events held year-round in the city. Amandine is hard to miss the famous brand names spelled out in neon on the buildings around Lake Geneva every night.

Amandine said that, as a very little girl, she was always talking about watches. She was 6 when her parents took her to the 2017 International Watch de la Haute Horlogerie, then known as S.I.H.H. and now renamed *Watches and Wonders Geneva*. She remembers trying on all the Bulgari watches and falling in love with a diamond-set Serpenti Tubogas, a model introduced in the 1940s with a coiled strap that wraps



around the forearm. “That’s when I decided I wanted to be a watchmaker-designer at Bulgari,” she said. “Since then, my dream hasn’t changed.” (She intends to study in Paris, then work at Bulgari, then start her own watch brand.)

And the Tubogas is still her dream watch, but she knows she has to wait for it. “I don’t even walk in the boutique,” she said as we passed the shop on Rue du Rhône.

That was in late August, when my 6-year-old son and I spent part of a day with Amandine and her father in Geneva, a city she loves and wanted to stop off. She had just returned from a monthlong vacation in Senegal to visit relatives, and school would be starting in a few days.

The first stop was the Swatch boutique on Rue du Marché, where the sales assistant immediately recognized Amandine as one of the customers who got a MoonSwatch on March 26, the day that the 11-piece collection debuted to near riots in several cities around the world.

Amandine and her father had waited in line outside the store for a few hours, giving her time to do a series of Instagram Stories about the experience. Once inside, she caught the attention of Andrew McUtchen, founder of the Australian website *Time + Tide Watches*, and he interviewed her for his MoonSwatch video (she spoke in English, a language she has been learning on her

own). And she got the pale blue Mission to Uranus MoonSwatch (\$260), too.

Today, in the much less crowded boutique, Amandine tried on one stainless steel watch, but didn’t ask her father to buy it, saying, “I will buy my next watch when it’s love at first sight.” Later she admitted that she had fallen for an iridescent Casio G-Shock Vapor, with hints of purple, her favorite color, when she saw it on the coloradotwatches Instagram account — but said she hasn’t actually asked that one either.

During lunch on Bains des Pâquis, a jetty on the shore of Lake Geneva, Amandine guided us through the basics of Swiss fondue (“if you drop your bread in the cheese, you have to do something, like sing a song”) and described Geneva Watch Days 2021, a trade show that could be called the start of her public career.

During a panel discussion titled “What Women Want,” Amandine’s father asked what advice the panelists — who included Yvonne Sar, head of communications at the Swiss brand Uwerk, and Suzanne Wong, editor in chief of *WorldTempus* — would give a 10-year-old interested in watchmaking. They said she should attend watch events, talk with people and do what she loves, then the moderator, the Phillips auctioneer Clara Kessi, asked Amandine to come onstage.

“I was a little embarrassed, but I reminded myself that they are all profes-



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sionals, they are all people who love this and there is no way will they judge me,” she said. “So I went up and explained a little bit about my passion. They liked it a lot.” Afterward, Mr. Bacs, who was in the audience, introduced himself and proposed doing the video.

Later, during a family discussion at home, Amandine’s father asked if she would like to start a social media site to share her opinions and, while she was enthusiastic, her mother was reluctant, but finally agreed. Her parents regularly help her with IG captions, and filter her direct messages. Her father said that, at least for now, Amandine would not become involved in any sponsorship or financial arrangement to ensure that her posts are free of any constraint. “Sometimes I get products sent to me,” Amandine said, “but I only talk about them if I’m really into them.”

On her Instagram feed, Amandine said, she is trying to achieve a balance between wrist shots and some where she is featured: “It’s weird to say, but my favorite type of photo is when there is no watch — for example, when I eat ice cream and I just share an enjoyable moment.”

The afternoon continued with a guided visit at the Patek Philippe Museum, which covers 500 years of general horological history. Amandine did not shy away from questioning the guide (“Why is there no seconds hand?” she wanted to know about an antique piece)

or expressing her opinion (“It’s too beautiful for what goes inside,” she said of an antique Patek Philippe tabatière, or snuff box).

She examined, and then photographed, some pocket watches with elaborate enameled cases and perfume atomizers inset with clocks. To her, studying art is equally important as studying watchmaking. “Art first. Then watchmaking, and design,” she said.

Amandine looks up to Daniela Dufour, a daughter of the Swiss watch master Philippe Dufour, who recently joined his atelier. “Not only is she incredibly talented, but she is so cool and stylish,” she said.

But Amandine doesn’t seem to be aware of the influence she may be having on younger children — like my son, who has been begging me to take wrist shots “just like Amandine” with the new dinosaur Flak Flak kids watch that I purchased for him while we all were at the Swatch boutique. She taught him how to buckle it and then how to read time.

When the museum visit came to an end, just like that, Amandine returned to her non-watch life, asking her father if they could have sushi for dinner.

Her friends and classmates don’t know about her watch industry fame. “They know I love watches, but I’m not going to tell them my Instagram account. Only my best friend knows, and she doesn’t go to my school,” Amandine said. “I just try to be a normal person.”

Watch her

From top: Amandine, 11, has caught the eye of the Swiss watch world with her social media posts about how she loves watches and wants to be a watchmaker; at the Patek Philippe Museum in Geneva; wearing a pink MoonSwatch.