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Savelli holds the line with emerald-encrusted smartphone

By Elisa Annis

Losing a phone is inconvenient. Losing a £145,000 limited edition Emerald Insane smartphone by Savelli, one of only eight in the world, would be traumatic.

The phone is encrusted with 12.5 carat brilliant cut diamonds and 4.5 carat baguette-cut emeralds by Gemfields. It launched this year in Harrods, the London department store, although Savelli will not say how many have been sold. Google's Android operating system lurks beneath the jewels.

Cheaper alternatives exist: the Blue Jeans Ostrich Elegante, also by Savelli, starts at £7,450. It has a specially developed "ultra-bombé sapphire crystal screen", which Savelli says is scratch-proof.

Savelli is one of a few labels positioning themselves where technology and luxury meet, by copying the techniques, materials and marketing practices of luxury watches and fine jewellery.

Phones that double as fine jewellery could catch on, say analysts. "Imagine a woman at a cocktail party holding the phone in her hand," says Robert Burke of New York-based luxury consultants Robert Burke Associates. "Savelli and Gemfields have been highly creative. It targets the fashion customer."

Alessandro Savelli, the Italian born chief executive, says: "Our number one objective was to create an elegant product."



The Emerald Insane

The 34-year-old entrepreneur co-founded the company in 2011 with Kitty Maisonrouge, a luxury-marketing expert he met at Columbia Business School. He started his career as an investment banker for UBS and had a connection to fine jewellery via his father's Vicenza-based jewellery business.

Savelli launched in 2013 in Harrods in London and Printemps, the Paris department store, backed by institutional and individual investors.

These included executives from LVMH and Richemont, Enrico Mambelli, the former chief executive of Gianfranco Ferré, James McArthur, chief executive of Anya Hindmarch, and Peter Ashall, co-founder and former chief executive of Vertu.

Vertu, which was set up in 1998, designs and builds its luxury phones in England. It has stores in cities including Paris, New York, Hong Kong and Tokyo, and sells phones in more than 50 countries.

Mr Savelli questions why, given that 1.8bn smart phones were sold globally in 2013, Swatch, Richemont, Cartier or even Samsung have not followed in Vertu's footsteps, leaving it to lesser-known brands such as watchmaker Ulysse Nardin's Chairman and Le Million, a solid gold mobile phone by Goldvish.

Peter Ashall, who co-founded Vertu with Frank Nuovo in 1997, joined the Savelli board three years ago. He says the brand appealed to him primarily because of the jewellery approach. "There's a fine line between extraordinarily well done and blingy, and it takes great finesse to do something like this well," he says, adding that the design of the product has been well received.

'There's a fine line between extraordinarily well done and blingy'

But in the US, sales of exclusive luxury smart phones have floundered. Even Vertu, the market leader, has

seen lower levels of market penetration. “The US is not really on our radar,” says Mr Savelli, adding that the brand is targeting China and Hong Kong.

Jason Campbell, a US-based commentator who describes himself as a “wardrobe therapist for high net-worth individuals”, says a retail price of \$10,000-\$25,000 is acceptable to his clients. “Something fun and handheld at this price would enjoy resonance,” he says.

He adds that his mostly “prudent” US clients might be fearful of losing a more expensive piece and that there could even be a level of embarrassment attached to having spent up to £145,000 on a phone.

The solution to losing a phone? “Buy another one,” quips its creator.

But he adds that a large part of Vertu’s turnover is based on returning customers, and hopes Savelli can follow suit.

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