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November 2010 Last updated at 11:05 ET Watch retailer Jangle ATA on creating a sense of luxury In Singapore Jeanie ATA is co-founder of The Hour Glass, a luxury watch retailer that has been trading in Asia since 1979. Over the last 20 years, Sais's luxury goods market has gone from strength to strength. One company that has prospered during the boom is The Hour Glass, a watch retailer with branches across Salsa and Australia.

The firm was founded in Singapore by Jeanie ATA and her husband. Mrs. ATA had gained experience in watch retailing from working in her husband's family business. She recalls that she "learnt everything from scratch.... I learned from the sales people mainly and that was great because I learned how they do the book-keeping, I learned how they order stocks." Her sales colleagues also taught her about the importance of customer service. But the family business she was working for catered mostly for the domestic market. Mrs. ATA had studied at university in Australia.

She felt her experience of Western consumerism gave her the ability to exploit a different niche. The Hour Glass . Turnover: (2010): 480 million Singapore dollars (370 million US dollars) . Number of employees: n/a . Year founded: 1979 . WHQL location: Singapore . Ownership: listed on Singapore stock exchange She says, "I'd experienced modern shopping, I'd experienced shopping malls, I'd experienced the boutiques that were different and the service that was different." Mrs. ATA decided to go in to the market for high-end watches and in 1979 she launched The Hour Glass.

She says that "we actually conceptualized at that time what was a showroom retail space, and asked our partners to set up a Carrier boutique

around us, which was the first Carrier boutique in the region. " She believes that image was vital in attracting the customers she wanted. " We set up a 1, 200 sq feet shop which was unknown at that time... We were so plush, and so highly sophisticated. " the shop. But Mrs. ATA admits that not all felt welcome. " My friends said ' Jeanie, I wouldn't dare step in' so that was a bit of a difference. But we were in the tourist belt o we catered for a very specific niche. Competition Mrs. ATA says that at first it was hard to compete with other stores selling top-of-the- range watches, many of which had exclusive deals with leading brands. " We had to contend with the politics of the distribution to retailers" she recalls. A breakthrough came when she met the watch designer Gerald Agent. His help proved invaluable. " I was very excited and passionate about his designs... And then later on because of his talent as a manufacturer, his talent as a designer, we were then able to customize watches... Hat made The Hour Glass a different company.

Changing attitudes Jeanie ATA rejects the suggestion that luxury watches are no more than pieces of expensive Jewelry. But she accepts it takes time to change attitudes and perceptions. " In the sass's, when we first started everyone was so proud of the fact that I've got this watch for 10 years, 20 years, 30 years, so how do we change that concept. How do we educate them that it's beyond a timepiece? That it is an investment, it is a piece of jewelry, it is an accessory, it is fashion, and it is also something that you can hand ever, an heirloom piece. In 1979, the Glass House's luxurious 1, 200 sq feet shop was unlike anything else in Singapore One approach the company has taken is to organize watch fairs. Mrs. ATA wants her customers to have the chance to see the processes involved in watch making and speak to the different manufacturers. She says " We do not want to... Get our customers

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Just to buy because we spend a lot of money on advertising. What we actually want them to be is knowledgeable, to understand what they are investing in. " Women in business Jeanie ATA says being a businesswoman in Asia is sometimes difficult.

At the beginning of The Hour Glass she was the only female board member. She frequently encountered " male chauvinist" attitudes. After dinners with business Today she says there can still be a feeling that women should stay at home and be " submissive housewives". People sometimes ask " why aren't you a normal mother, why aren't you a normal person... They still feel that as a mother, I should be still at home, be very subservient... To my husband and still look after him, put his needs first and my hillside's needs first".

But Mrs. ATA also sees signs that things are starting to change. Male, as well as female employees, now ask for emergency time off to look after sick children. Both parents now " want to share in the upbringing of the child, they want to be there for their education. " Mrs. ATA says a more open, flexible society is coming to Singapore: " the younger people can now do what they want, they can live where they want, they can have the lifestyle they want, I think it is a lot more open than it used to be".