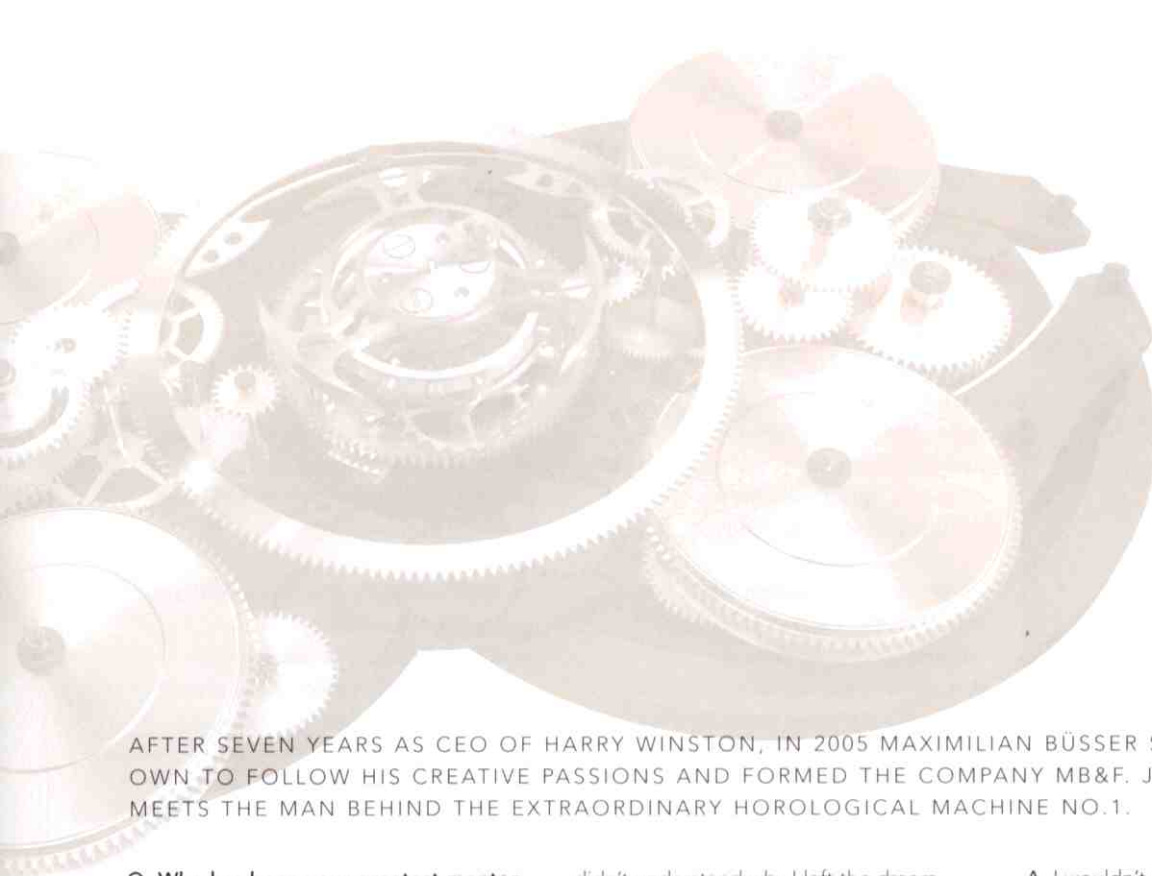


TIMELY INNOVATIONS

A man with dark hair and a slight beard is sitting on a dark leather couch. He is wearing a dark, long-sleeved button-down shirt and blue jeans. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is dark. The text 'TIME MACHINES' is overlaid in white, spaced-out capital letters across the middle of the image.

T I M E M A C H I N E S



AFTER SEVEN YEARS AS CEO OF HARRY WINSTON, IN 2005 MAXIMILIAN BÜSSER STRUCK OUT ON HIS OWN TO FOLLOW HIS CREATIVE PASSIONS AND FORMED THE COMPANY MB&F. JENNIFER PINKERTON MEETS THE MAN BEHIND THE EXTRAORDINARY HOROLOGICAL MACHINE NO.1.

Q. Who has been your greatest mentor within the watchmaking industry?

A. My most important inspiration has been Günter Blümlein. He was the head of what was known in those days as LMH (Les Manufactures Horologie), which was the regrouping of Jaeger-LeCoultre, IWC and A. Lange & Söhne. During my first job at Jaeger-LeCoultre, he was an amazing visionary, a strategic creator.

Q. What were the greatest lessons you learned while at JLC?

A. To treat the customer with respect, and also that, when they are beautifully crafted, the products will sell themselves without glamorous marketing.

Q. What lessons did you draw from your time at Harry Winston?

A. When you surround yourself with passionate, competent people, there is no obstacle you cannot overcome. And the more we think 'outside the box', the more pleasure we derive from our creations.

Q. What did insiders say when you first announced the formation of your own company, MB&F (Maximilian Büsser & Friends)?

A. I don't really know what they said! Probably at the beginning, a lot of people

didn't understand why I left the dream CEO job I had [at Harry Winston] to go solo. Those that were entrepreneurs at heart understood why I did this. The others probably shook their heads in disbelief.

Q. What were your key design criteria for Horological Machine No.1?

A. We called them Horological Machines because we are exploring that third dimension which is rarely seen in horology. We craft machines which give time, instead of round, square or rectangular objects. The first piece needed to have philosophical significance because it was the first project from MB&F, and that's why we chose that shape, which is like two worlds coming together. In fact, in MB&F, it is not two worlds, but 20 coming together, because we're all friends. There's no hierarchy between us, we're all creating on the same level. In the centre of it, I needed to have the heartbeat, which is the tourbillon. The heart beats in the centre of the two worlds. There will not be any DNA linking one product with the next. HM2 will not be like HM1, and so on. This is the freedom and luxury we afford ourselves.

Q. What was the initial feedback on the HM1, and would you do anything differently if you had your time again?

A. I wouldn't change anything. What were the first reactions? Stunned. The six retailers I approached with just the design took at least one night to digest it, and then the reaction was extraordinary. With this product, you don't have any reference, it's not something people see and think, "Oh, that's something I know." It's difficult to relate to. When people first see it, they'll say, "That looks like a pair of binoculars, or an owl, or the speedometer of a car." These people are mostly men, in fact. They look for something in their everyday world which resembles it. When you tell them, "Well, it's not a watch, it's a machine which gives the time. Don't expect a watch," they tend to be much more receptive.

Q. Who do you see as the watch's main customers?

A. Our customers will be spread all over the world. We will be in the US, Europe and Asia. There will probably be two sorts of clients: the real movement specialists, who will be smitten by the technology regardless of the design, and then there will be timepiece collectors who have one day opened their cupboard or box and realised they have 20, 40 or 100 of the same object. They will ask themselves, "Why am I always collecting the same stuff?" They will want to go down the other

"WE'RE NOT ABOUT BIG MARKETING CAMPAIGNS AND WE DON'T DO ANY ADVERTISING. IT'S ALL ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE."

road. Now we at MB&F are not the only ones to go down that road, there are a few other innovative watchmakers out there, and all of us appeal to the same sorts of collectors – those who are trying to find another way of doing things.

Q. When you presented HM1, did any market's reaction particularly surprise you?

A. I was amazed that the Asian market reacted so positively. Because even though it's easy to wear, it's a big watch. We did create it specifically to be worn on small wrists because I have a minute wrist – if I can't wear my own creations, then why am I creating these products? But in Asia, Japan particularly, I didn't expect that much of a response. But in fact, our Singaporean and Tokyo retailers have pre-sold their yearly allocation.

Q. What stage of production is Horological Machine No.2 at?

A. It's in prototype mode, meaning that we already have the prototype of the case, and this week we're receiving the last parts needed to start assembling the remaining three prototypes. These will be tested for approximately six months, and if everything goes well, we will be presenting it to the world in the middle of the year.

Q. How do you plan to market HM2?

A. We're not about big marketing campaigns and we don't do any advertising. It's all about the experience. So I'll be travelling the world for about three weeks and meeting with 40 to 50 editors, talking with them for an hour or so, letting them play with the watch and giving them an opportunity to tell me how they feel about it. So this isn't the usual watch industry marketing campaign of "I'll invite you to a big bash and we'll have a lot of champagne and please talk about my product."

Q. How long does each stage of development take?

A. From initial sketch to prototype takes about 18 to 22 months. But all in all, it probably takes two and a half years from sketch to final product stage.

Q. What is MB&F's relationship with retail group The Hour Glass?

A. When I left Harry Winston, I didn't have enough money to finance the whole of my new venture. So I took the plunge, not knowing how I would get financing. I went to see six retailers around the world, among them The Hour Glass, and asked, "Are you interested in carrying this concept and ordering it, and if you are, can you finance up to one-third of an advance payment?" On HM1, all six of them said yes, and I needed that to kick-start the project. However, we're not doing that for further pieces. So The Hourglass has committed financially to the first piece, but for numbers two, three and four, this will return to a normal working relationship.

Q. What advice would you give to budding watchmakers/designers aspiring to develop something new or original?

A. My advice would be to find the right ambassadors, and those are retail networks like The Hour Glass who will help you get known, because most smaller watchmakers don't have any PR or marketing networks. They can get very nervous wondering if and when they can sell their product. Also, wait until your product is 100 per cent reliable before putting it on the market. There are too many products which are launched, and then take a year and a half or two years to appear, and even then, they still don't work. There are not enough watchmakers daring to innovate. They tend to create magnificent pieces that come back to the roots of horology and stay in the classic form. My most important advice would be to innovate. ©

TOP: THE ELEVATED CENTRAL TOURBILLON OF THE HOROLOGICAL MACHINE NO.1. ABOVE: THE STRIKING HM1, WHICH BOASTS 376 PARTS, 81 FUNCTIONAL JEWELS, FOUR MAINSPRING BARRELS AND A SEVEN-DAY POWER RESERVE.