

THE MASTER AND HIS FRIENDS

CALL HIM MAD MAXIMILIAN. THE FORMER BRAINS BEHIND HARRY WINSTON'S OPUS COLLECTION IS NOW THE INFERNAL GENIUS BEHIND RADICAL NEW HOROLOGICAL MACHINES

Maximilian Büsser brings highly original timepieces to three-dimensional life



After many years mastering the intricacies of corporate watchmaking, Maximilian Büsser, the former managing director of the iconic Harry Winston Rare Timepieces operation, shrugged off his chains and started a rebellion.

A rebellion called, interestingly, MB & Friends. Billed as “an artistic and micro-engineering concept laboratory in which changing collectives of independent horological professionals are assembled each year to craft radical horological machines,” MB & Friends combine high-quality watchmaking traditions with bold technology and avant-garde design.

Passionate professionals all, they are dedicated to bringing totally original timekeeping concepts to life: innovative, three-dimensional haute horlogerie, world-premiere complications, and superb finish and quality – in exclusive limited edition models. They respect tradition without allowing themselves to be bound by it.

MB & Friends has created audacious projects that are creating profound ripples in the horological world. A growing brood of complicated watches are pushing the boundaries of timepiece technology, starting with the first watch from the brand – the HM1 or Horological Machine 1.

Featuring a tourbillon and a seven-day power reserve, the HM1 was conceptualised by Büsser, designed by a former architect, Eric Giroud, and was built by movement engineers Laurent Besse and Peter Speake-Marin. So exciting was the design, all 30 of the first year’s planned production run were pre-sold to six retailers around the world.

And now there is the spectacular Horological Machine 2. Maximilian Büsser was recently in Hong Kong to present his latest creation, and spoke to REVOLUTION.

YOUR GOAL IS TO LAUNCH A NEW WATCH EVERY YEAR, WITH A NEW MOVEMENT. ARE YOU ACCOMPLISHING THIS?

For the time being, yes. In 2007 we launched the Horological Machine 1, and we produced 30 watches, all sold. That was more difficult than I thought. We had problems with the sub-contractors, but it’s done. The watch is here, and you can see it on the wrist of amateurs. We are now launching the Horological Machine 2 in 2008, and the first watches will be delivered at the end of March. I’ve already seen the prototypes of the Horological Machine 3 and we plan to launch soon the first studies for number four, which is planned for 2010.

In regions like western Europe and the United States, they see these watches as overly complicated. There, nobody dares to wear watches like that. They prefer classical, traditional timepieces. In Asia, it’s a totally different story. Here, collectors are bolder and like very special, unique creations. I’ve currently six points of sale for my watches in this part of the world and only one in Europe and one in the United States. All the others are either in Asia or in the Middle East.

THREE YEARS ON, DO YOU REGRET RESIGNING FROM SUCH A SUCCESSFUL OPERATION AS HARRY WINSTON?

Not at all. It was sometimes difficult. I was afraid at one time I did not have enough money to survive, but I was able to count on the fidelity and the financial support of the retailers, who paid in advance 35 percent of

The limited edition Horological Machine 2



the price of Horological Machine 1, after having only seen the prototype, which showed their commitment.

But now all these problems – the usual problems of any young company – are behind me and I can focus on what I like best: creating, producing and selling exceptional watches, with complete liberty, in a small and flexible structure.

SOME PEOPLE HAVE CALLED YOUR HOROLOGICAL MACHINE 2 PURE WATCH-PORN - GIVEN ITS OBSCURE MECHANICAL INNOVATIONS.

As you can see, the Horological Machine 2 is a completely different watch, with an iconoclastic case, which looks like a “steampunk watch”, as one of my friends said. On the left dial, you have a retrograde date and bi-hemisphere moon phase. On the right dial, you find jumping hours and concentric retrograde minutes.

I designed the watch myself, the case is produced by Châtelain, the movement was designed by Jean-Marc Wiederrecht, an exceptional watchmaker, who has just won the Grand Prix de l’Horlogerie award in Geneva – and powered by a Girard-Perregaux oscillator and gear train.

I think it’s the most complicated case ever produced for a watch. It has more than 100 components, and nearly 350 components for the movement, which all fit perfectly into the case, which is very important to me.

The look of the watch was inspired by the Meccano sets of my childhood. As with the Horological Machine 1, it’s a limited edition model of 125 pieces in white gold/titanium and 125 in red gold/titanium, to be delivered over three years. But even before that happens, I’ll meet the people of Hong Kong to show them Horological Machine 3. Trust me, it will surprise you. ★