

With a Little Help From My Friends

OK, so Maximilian Büsser's MB&F wristpieces can tell the time – but more fundamentally, he tells **CARAGH MCKAY**, they reflect his love of, and obsession with, science-fiction comics



"I WAS TOLD there are two moments in your life when you realise you are mortal," states Maximilian Büsser. "The

first is when you have your first child, the second is when you lose a parent." It's just two minutes and twelve seconds into my first conversation with Büsser – creator of MB&F (Maximilian Büsser & Friends), the watch brand currently setting international horophiles' pulses racing – and I have to say that I'm intrigued that we have reached the mid-life-crisis confession already.

"My father passed away eight years ago and it was like a wake-up call that I'm not here for ever – I could be here for 50 years or gone in two days," muses the fresh-faced 42-year-old. He is explaining the events that led to his life-changing decision, five years ago, to leave his plum job as managing director of Harry Winston Rare Timepieces. In his time at the helm, Büsser, who had previously worked in a senior role at Jaeger-LeCoultre, put the American jeweller on the horological map with his benchmark Opus designs.



"Everybody was proud of me but I wasn't so proud of myself," he recalls. "I spent my life creating products to sell more to make more money – there was nothing of me in them. Don't get me wrong, that is business and that's the way the world works but I thought 'I want to create things I believe in'. So I started dreaming of my ideal company."

Büsser left Harry Winston on 15 July 2005 and created MB&F the very next day. He had just £400,000 – equivalent to half a paltry old pence in watch money.

He knew it was a long shot but his vision was clear. Büsser worked alone from home for two years and "kept a little money aside to live like a student". Five months later he had designed MB&F's "No1 piece" – an exquisitely engineered design fashioned into a horizontal figure-of-eight. He then travelled the world showing it to the retailers he'd known at Harry Winston. They were keen, but there was a catch: "I told them that I didn't have enough money and asked if they would be kind enough to pay 35 per cent upfront if I promised to deliver the first pieces in two years," he says. Six of them said yes.

Not only is this a remarkable vote of faith in business terms, but MB&F's wristpieces are so, well, crazy, that it represents a resounding vote of confidence in the future of the watch industry, too. There's a growing appetite among horophiles for the kind of adventurous one-offs that young, independent makers such as MB&F are creating.

Described as 'horological machines', MB&F designs are technically brilliant but, to be frank, rather hard for a girl to get her head around. They look like something that might transport you to another dimension. But then that is exactly what Büsser, a self-confessed sci-fi comic lover, is aiming for.

"Honestly, it's really difficult to read the time on our pieces because that's not what we're all about. It's about creating 3D works



of art, which, by the way, give time. At least 99 per cent of the world might ask, 'Why the hell would you wear something like that?' but I know ten people who already have our first three machines and 22 have two out of the three."

Like the true inventor that he is, Büsser, an only child, also created a set of friends to embark on his crazy plan with him. "Our brand name really has a meaning – all the skilled artists, creators, watchmakers that you see on our website work for many of the key watch names but you would not know it. But they helped my dream to come true and in return I give them a communication platform for their skills. They can finally tell the world: 'Look what I'm capable of doing'. Something tells me we haven't seen even the half of what Büsser is capable of yet. **H** mbandf.com; *Sussex*: Marcus, 170 New Bond St, *WI*; 020 7290 6500; marcuswatches.co.uk