

The masters of time



Les Maitres du Temps

Powering the rolling bars at top and bottom of the Chapter One presented Christophe Claret with a serious challenge. The watch will be produced in 11 versions, with three pieces in each version, cased in a choice of white or rose gold.

By Anne Glusker

The concept behind Maitres du Temps is either a great, generously creative concept or a masterpiece of marketing, depending on your point of view. Steven Holtzman, who wants to be the ringmaster and impresario of horology, came up with the savvy idea of uniting various watchmaking "masters" and setting them loose to collaborate.

"This is the golden age of the independent watchmaker," he says. "In the past, your watch was made by a faceless set of hands, but if you know who made your watch, it adds a dimension, a personality. Independent watchmakers are the best part of the industry. I thought if I could put together a bunch of elements, I could end up with something really great. I'm the connector."

Holtzman's goal is to present a new team, with a new collection, if not every year, then at regular intervals.

His first offering, fittingly named Chapter One, will debut in Geneva during the Salon International de Haute Horlogerie, and for its conception he has put together a team of watchmaking all-stars.

Christophe Claret, a founding partner in World Première — producer of the Jean Dunand brand — and the guiding spirit in his own homonymous company, is one of the "maîtres." The other two are Roger Dubuis, an elder statesman of the industry, and the up-and-coming Peter Speake-Marin.

Each brought different strengths to the project, which was in development for three years. Holtzman himself has 25 years of experience in the distribution end of the watch business.

The resulting watch is very complicated, with "a lot going on," Holtzman said. The Chapter One is a monopush chronograph with tourbillon and double retrograde, showing the date and Greenwich Mean Time. Rolling bars at the top and bottom of the watch show the phases of the moon and the day. "It was quite an achievement to create enough power, enough torque to move these giant rolling bars, after 23 hours and 59 minutes, to the next day," he said.

It was Claret who helped solve the problem of powering the rolling bars, but each partner brought a specific set of skills to the project. Holtzman credits Claret with having great ideas, Dubuis with representing the old school of Geneva watchmaking with deep historical knowledge, and Speake-Marin with guiding the project and bringing it together. As for himself, the impresario said: "Because I come from the distribution end, I know what the watch is supposed to feel like in the store in Ukraine or Singapore or New York, and then I can take that knowledge and roll it back to the creation."

There will be 11 versions of the Chapter One watch, with 3 pieces for each version, making a limited edition of 33 pieces available in white gold and rose gold. The watches will be differentiated by varying dials and cases. The price will be approximately 400,000 Swiss francs, or \$400,000.

Matthew Morse, editor of Revolution USA magazine, said rumors were flying thick and fast about other details of the watch. "I trust it will be one of the highlights of the 2008 watch fairs, highly complicated," he said. "People are saying it will be very cool, with more than three hands, and perhaps some crazy shape — not round.

"Steven Holtzman is playing this high-end game, placing himself in the forefront of the boutique watch movement."

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INDEPENDENT
WATCHMAKERS IN
THEIR GOLDEN AGE