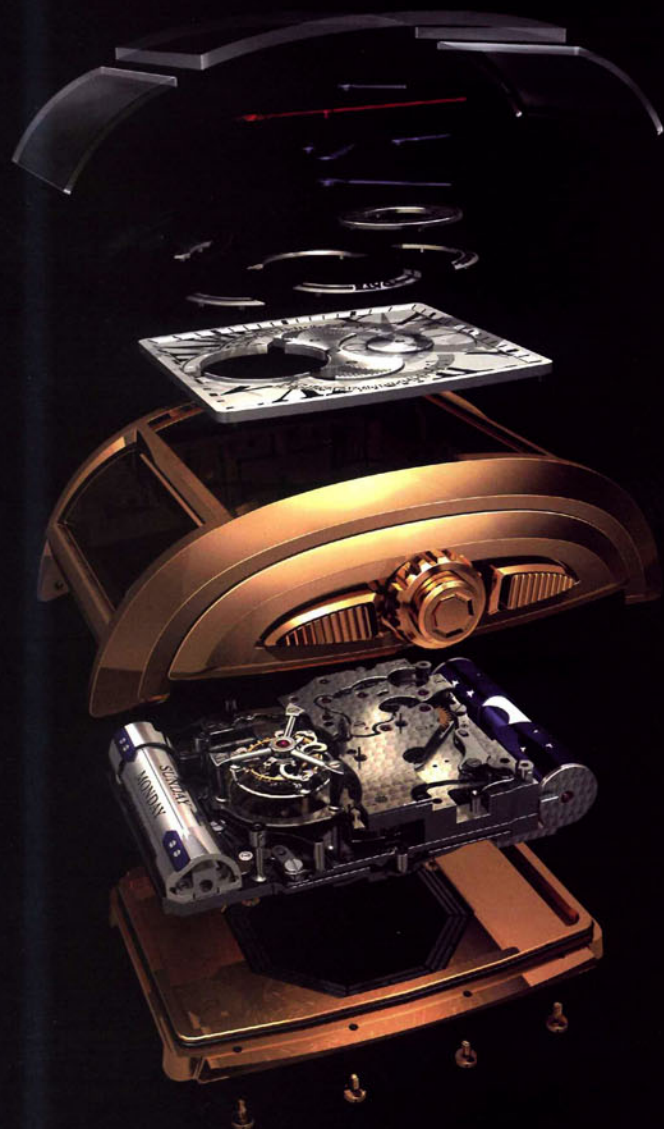


A NEW CONCEPT OF ALLIANCE

WHAT IF YOU CAN OWN A WATCH THAT IS CREATED BY NOT ONE BUT BEARS THE MARKS OF A FEW MASTER WATCHMAKERS? YIP MIN-TING GETS A CLOSER LOOK AT ONE SUCH TIMEPIECE.



A revolution in the watch industry is in the works and watch veterans are sitting up: this is the era of the watchmakers. One of these veterans, Steven Holtzman, has seized the moment and emerged with a marketing feat—his own brand, *Maitres du Temps*, that pulls together teams of talented watchmakers to produce exclusive timepieces. Holtzman, who has over 25 years of experience in the sale and distribution of watches, intends to make the concept of collaboration the crux of his brand, which launched its debut collection, Chapter One, in Geneva at Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie (SIHH) this year.

Chapter One was conceptualised and constructed by three well-known watchmakers: Roger Dubuis, coaxed out of his retirement to contribute his extensive historical knowledge of watchmaking; Christopher Claret, who specialises in complications and owns his own manufacturing plant; and up-and-coming Peter Speake-Marin, whose contemporary ideas and project management skills completes the highly skilled team. The attraction of *Maitres du Temps* for the watchmakers, according to Walter Ribaga, Project Consultant for the brand, is that "here is a company that will put watchmakers together to collaborate and put their names in front of the brand, when usually brands tend to hide the name of the watchmaker they employ".

Not only did aggressive brand-building to the extent of obscuring the name of the watchmaker but also the advance of technology nearly destroyed the tradition of watchmaking, which started out as a small-scale process where one watchmaker constructs his watch from start to finish and there is personal pride and accomplishment in his work. Technology brought about machinery that could streamline production into various specialist fields, from assembling the various components to finishing, and vast quantities of one creation could be produced, resulting in lower costs and higher profits. Further advancements in technology nearly killed off the mechanical watch as timepieces became bought more for its aesthetic value and prestige rather than technical artistry.

However, independent watchmakers are not backing down without a fight and watch connoisseurs are lavishing their support. Holtzman reveals that demand has already exceeded the limited edition of 33 pieces of Chapter One, priced at US\$400,000 (S\$545,842) each. There are different variations of the watches, which come in varying dials and cases, and the team hopes to come up with a round version soon and stretch production to 50. "There are limitations on output as everything is done by hand and it takes one month to assemble one watch, but Chapter Two will have more pieces, about 1,000," he says.



Maitres du Temps
GMT DATE
SWISS MADE

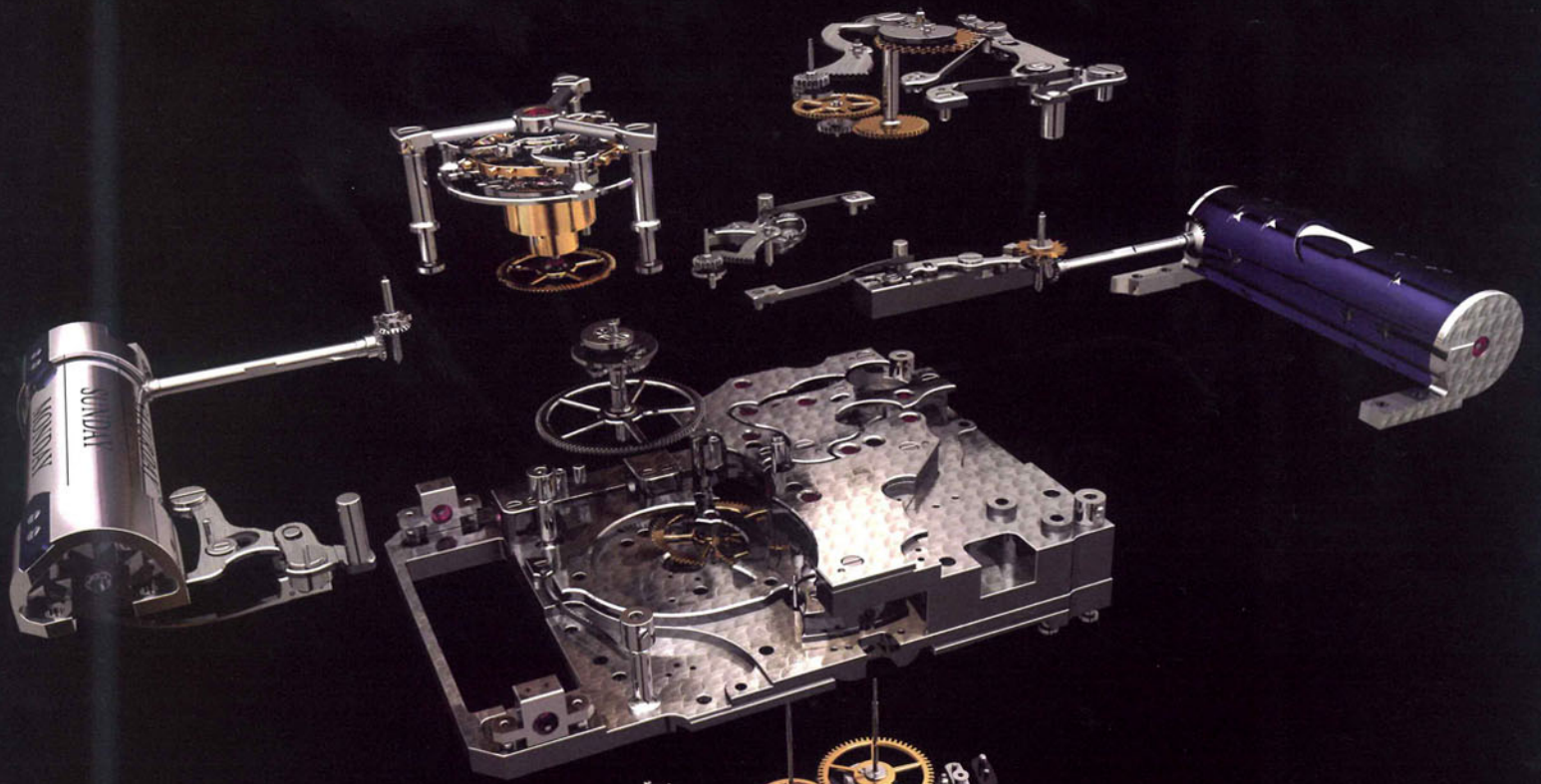
MONDAY
TUESDAY
WEDNESDAY

Maitres du Temps
CHAPTER ONE

750

GMT
MDT8001
MOON

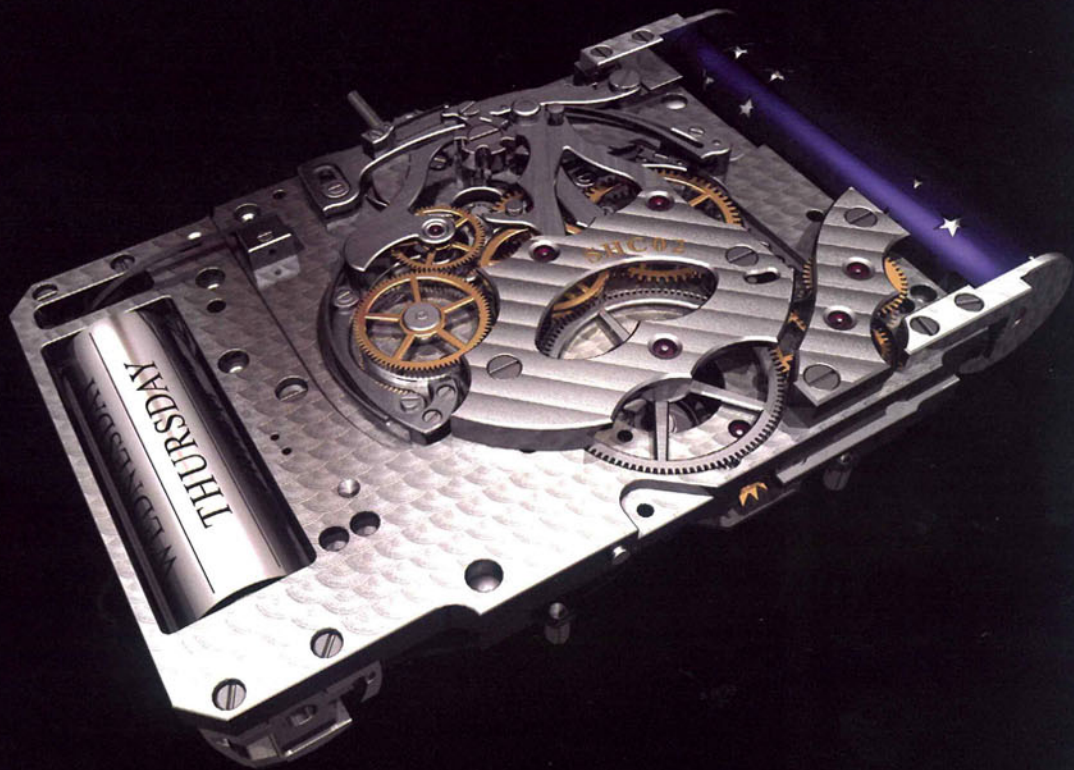
Masters and Their Craft
A Lifelong Pursuit of Excellence



ALL ABOUT COLLABORATION

So, what is special about Chapter One? "The concept of the rollers is the DNA of the watch. There are seven complications in it and while each complication might be common on its own, the combination of all seven is a technical feat. There is also a 60-hour power reserve and 558 parts, of which the case itself contains more than a hundred. The four pushers on the case are correctors for the different displays and they have a locking system so that they cannot be changed unintentionally," Ribaga says. Other features include a one minute tourbillon, mono-pusher chronograph, retrograde date and GMT indicator, and rolling bars showing the phases of the moon and the day.

Convincing teams of watchmakers to collaborate has been the main challenge for the brand, but Holtzman is optimistic about the teams' synergy. "Each person will have his own idea on what will work, so there are sure to be conflicts, but I think the teams have dealt well with them," he says. Would it not be better then for just one watchmaker to produce one collection? "The identity of the brand is to have the collaboration between watchmakers. This means that the product will have the influence and the best ideas from a few watchmakers, and we will get a product that will be different from one that is created by only one watchmaker. For Chapter One for example, Christophe came up with the tourbillon cage bridge; Roger modified it, made it more flamboyant; and Peter adapted it into the design," Ribaga states.





From left: Peter Speake-Marin, Roger Dubuis, Christophe Claret and Steven Holtzman

Personally, Dubuis enjoys the collaboration with Claret and Speake-Marin. "It gives me and the other two the opportunity to exchange views freely," he says. He will also contribute to Chapters Two and Three, which will be launched at the end of this year and next year respectively. This is a large part of the attraction of collaboration that Holtzman was counting on as watchmakers could learn and exchange ideas with one other. He also teams young and older watchmakers together so there can be a blend of contemporary and traditional ideas.

The huge allure of watches produced by independent watchmakers is mainly based on the priority given to the product and not the profits. So, the watchmaker puts in a lot of effort for the sake of delivering a high quality and creative product, not just for commercial reasons. As Ribaga puts it: "There is real value and honest craftsmanship in the watches."

Holtzman adds: "As there is more consolidation (of watch brands), there will be more challenges and opportunities for independent watchmakers to change the direction of watch companies. There has to be this cottage industry of artistry, whether of watchmakers, micro-mechanics or assembly; and I think it's going to limit itself to excellence."

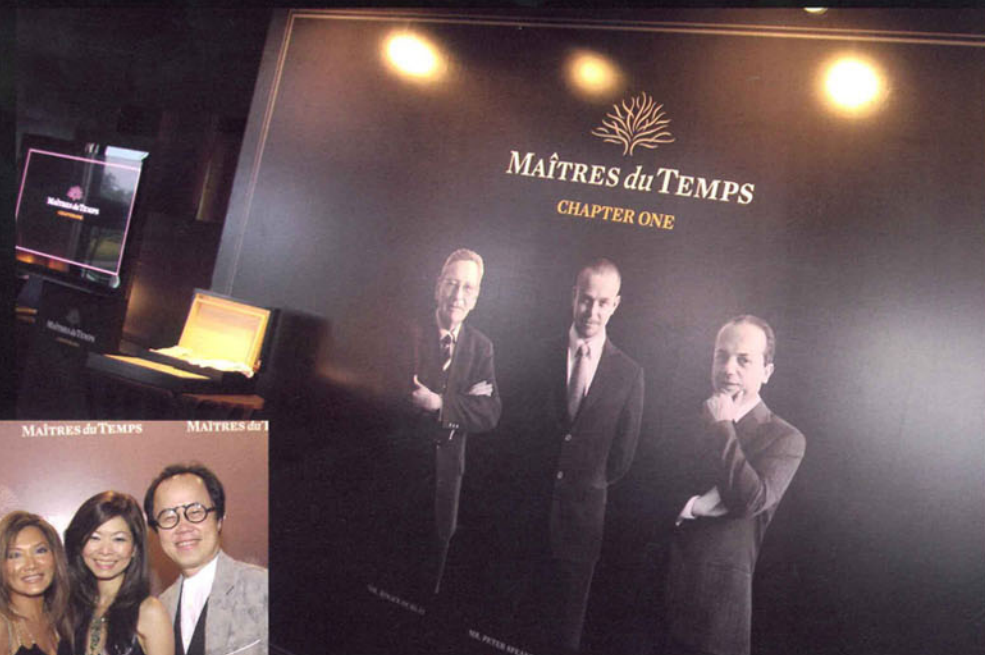
INDEPENDENT DESIGNS

For those independent watchmakers who staunchly refuse to be integrated into the big brands for fear that the homogeneity of product lines would compromise their creativity and craft, many are launching their own brands. Dubuis remains positive about this evolution. "I would like for this to continue. These watchmakers deserve respect from trade and customers as they are able to express themselves and their craft through their creations without influence from others. This will inspire young people to learn the craft, and this is important to the Swiss watch industry," he says.

While the Swiss watch industry may have suffered a dwindling number of young people taking up the craft of watchmaking, veterans are looking beyond Swiss shores for innovative, high quality watches. Ribaga observes: "Watchmaking will be more international as more talented watchmakers come from other parts of the world." For the record, Dubuis is Swiss, Claret is French and Speake-Marin is English.

New perspectives spell new life and progress and this important evolution does not escape Dubuis and Holtzman. Dubuis says: "We will get new spirit and a new way of working. There will be new ways of developing and conceiving new movements and design." Holtzman adds: "We are constantly finding new solutions and new materials to improve things. For example, we are using a light material made of aluminium for the rollers (in Chapter One) so that it will need less power and lubrication to work them."

It goes without saying that launching one's own brand involves a lot of risk and capital, and the fact remains that many brands come and go. So, Holtzman plans to develop his brand "slowly, cautiously and correctly". "We plan to release a new chapter or two every year. At this moment we have five projects going on simultaneously. We hope to launch Chapter Four and Five in 2010." **RT**



WRITING THE FIRST CHAPTER

SINGAPORE—Chapter One made its debut in Singapore on June 16, 2008 at a private dinner at il Lido, hosted by Maitres du Temps founder Steven Holtzman, COO Walter Ribaga, VP Margaret Pane, and master watchmaker, Roger Dubuis. This was the third stop of the Maitres du Temps Asia Tour 2008 after a successful introduction in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

It was the first opportunity for a select 60 Singapore watch collectors and VIPs to view this exquisite masterpiece, limited to only 33 pieces.

The evening was an intimate and lively affair. Guests were treated to contemporary Italian

cuisine expertly prepared by Chef Osvaldo Forlino and his crew at il Lido. If one could peel their eyes off the magnificent Chapter One that was displayed in an exquisite leather box at centrestage, they were probably enjoying the panoramic view of the Singapore Straits with a glass of wine in hand.

Real Time Singapore was privileged to host a table for our associates who are all keen watch collectors. The next day, Maitres du Temps headed to Shanghai and Beijing, where *Real Time* China hosted the exclusive events with Rootz Hong Kong.

