

DESTINED FOR GREATNESS

MAÎTRES DU TEMPS CHAPTER ONE

With the reputations of its masterful watchmakers preceding it, all eyes are on Maitres du Temps and its founder Steven Holtzman, as it launches its first watch, Chapter One **BY WEI KOH**



We are born and then we're named. Some names live in obscurity, merging seamlessly with the miasma of the status quo. But then there are the other names; names that soar beyond the ordinary and become so intertwined with the fabric of excellence in their chosen field that they become inseparable from the very perception of the term. In literature, names like Fitzgerald and Hemingway; in filmmaking, Kurosawa and Scorsese; and in art, Rothko and Pollack — these are the names that stride fiercely in the halls of greatness. In independent watchmaking — the art form that exists in simultaneous symbiosis and conflict with the commercial watch industry — names like Philippe Dufour, Roger Dubuis, Christophe Claret, Kari Voutilainen, and Peter Speake-Marin populate the pantheon of greatness. Each of these watchmakers articulates his vision of perfect horological art through the watches he makes. Each of their watches is pure, untouched by gimmickry and removed from marketing hype.

Yet there are limits to what an individual can achieve. As with all the greatest moments in art, extraordinary creativity emerges from collaboration.

In music, John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman proved that when great minds meet, they compel and complement each other to ascend to higher levels of collective achievement. This was precisely what American watch industry veteran Steven Holtzman recognized several years ago, when he asked himself that all-important question: "Can I bring the greatest minds in independent watchmaking together to collaborate on seminal acts of horological art?" The answer — as expressed in the reverent, yet iconoclastic new brand founded by Holtzman, Maitres du Temps — is a resounding "Yes"!

AN ALL-NEW CONCEPT The brand Maitres du Temps, which literally means "Masters of Time" in French, unites groups of brilliant minds in watchmaking to bring forth true magic in horology. Even then, referring to Maitres du Temps as a "brand" is somewhat misleading, for it is not a typical watch company, but represents a convention-smashing, all-new concept in high luxury. It is the creation of an artistic crucible, a hothouse for ideas, and the very first of its kind in watchmaking history. Says Holtzman, "I saw myself as the connective



tissue that united these great minds. I was a catalyst pushing these great collaborations forward. Through this incredible project, I have the pleasure of working with some of horology's greatest heroes, as well as some who point the spotlight on undiscovered talents. I give them a platform for their creativity. It was important [for me] to select people with complementary skills, and who intuitively and rapidly find their individual roles in the process. So, to some extent, it was also a matter of understanding their personalities. It was by blending the different styles and talents of these watchmakers that Maitres du Temps became a reality."

When asked what unites all the watchmakers he selected for Maitres du Temps, Holtzman says quickly, "Craft. There is nothing more honest than human craftsmanship. It is totally devoid of marketing's smoke and mirrors. There is a supreme honesty in craft, and this was how I decided on whom I wanted to work with. I looked at the watches they created. I had no desire to work with people who were making the wildest or most extroverted timepieces. I was looking for people who, in every detail of their watches, from the beveling of an internal angle to the black polish of a bridge, embodied the true values of watchmaking."

Another pertinent question posed to Holtzman was how Maitres du

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Temps differs from Harry Winston's Opus project, where the legendary jeweler collaborated with independent watchmakers. Holtzman's answer: "While I have enormous respect for what Harry Winston has done, the Opus project seeks to marry the values of a large brand with [those of] an independent watchmaker. Watchmaking talents have to work with the parameters of the brand. In Maitres du Temps, the only limits are the watchmakers' imagination and what their hands are capable of executing. Beyond this, they are given total freedom of expression, and the watch you see embodies artisan purity. It is an embrace of the traditional values, aesthetic mores and horological language that they hold so dear."

Each Maitres du Temps watch is meant to resonate beyond the here and now. It is meant, as the greatest timepieces do, to reach beyond the ephemeral realm of the present and have everlasting relevance in the permanent history of watchmaking. Points out Holtzman, "A Maitres du Temps watch [aims to be] a pinnacle work and a testament to the skills and inventiveness of the master artisans of our time."

INDEPENDENT WATCHMAKING What is independent watchmaking? A man imagines a watch; he sits down on a bench and, through the exercise of will fueled by unremitting passion, he creates a singular act of artistic expression. Independent watchmaking is made up of actual watchmakers. It is not the result of marketing committees and boards of directors. It represents a purity of spirit and an adamant refusal to dilute the art of legitimate watchmaking in deference to the conveyor-belt automation of industrial horology. Indeed, in recent years, independent watchmakers have become the commercial industry's greatest resources; their expertise has been tapped in varying forms of joint ventures with large corporate enterprises. But Maitres du Temps stands in polar opposition to this unbalanced relationship. Says independent watchmaker Christophe Claret, "Real watchmaking [like that] at Maitres du Temps puts the watchmakers first. It allows the client, the lover of extremely complicated



The master artisans:
(from left) Roger Dubuis,
Peter Speake-Marin and
Christophe Claret

watchmaking, to get to know the creators of the product — the people who have designed, made, and assembled the watch."

Argues independent watchmaker Peter Speake-Marin on behalf of independent watchmaking, "I think it is a reaction to an increasingly digitized, disposable world. People are looking for real products created by real people."

Says Holtzman, "The goal with Maitres du Temps is to pull down the barrier between the watchmaker and the end-user. In many ways, we are totally subverting the common concept of a brand, which draws its power from putting up a big curtain of mystery between the user and the artisan who made the product. Because, from my experience, I know that this is the direction modern luxury is heading in. Look at the resurgence in interest in bespoke tailoring. The sophisticated contemporary consumer wants to meet the person creating something for him."

POETIC CHAMPIONS — THE WATCHMAKERS So it fell to Holtzman to decide on his dream team for the first chapter in his new adventure. He

decided on three individuals, each representing a different generation in watchmaking: Roger Dubuis, Christophe Claret and Peter Speake-Marin. "Part of my rationale for choosing people representing three generations of independent watchmaking relates to the value of collaboration. At Maitres du Temps, it is vital that, through each project, vital knowledge is transmitted from one generation to the next. In this way, each project also serves to preserve the precious know-how of true craftsmanship," he explains.

The term "journeyman" can easily be applied to Roger Dubuis, who was for 15 years the top technical mind at Patek Philippe, where he specialized in creating supercomplicated wristwatches. During the difficult period of the Swiss Quartz Crisis, Dubuis continually pushed to safeguard the values of Swiss watchmaking and thus can be perceived as one of mechanical watchmaking's staunchest champions. Following his tenure with the legendary brand, Dubuis struck out on his own and made history when he and fellow watchmaker Jean-Marc Wiederrecht created the world's first double-retrograde perpetual calendar wristwatch for

Harry Winston. He then went on to co-found the brand that bears his name today, developing one of the greatest arrays of in-house calibers, including his signature double-retrograde perpetual calendar.

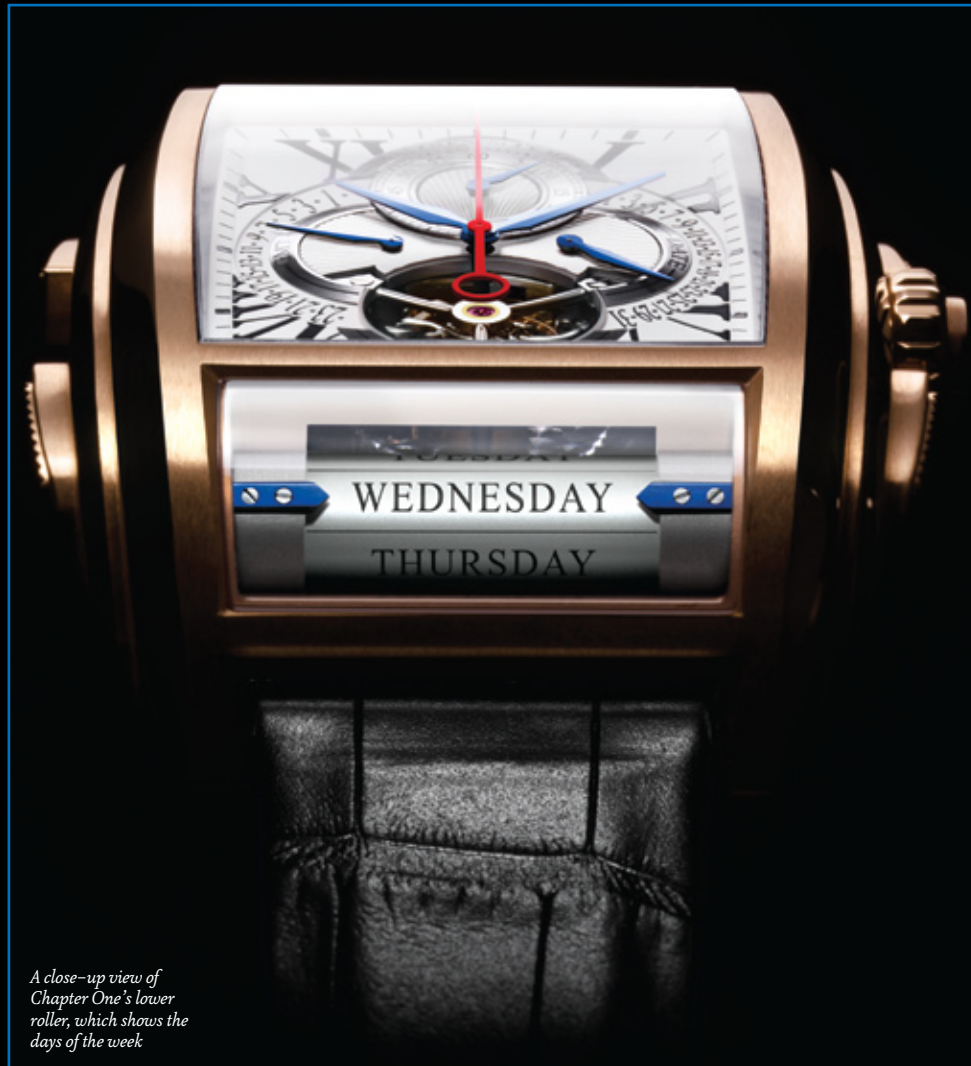
The very existence of the modern watchmaking industry can be largely attributed to Christophe Claret. As the watch industry was rebuilding itself in the 1980s, it was largely incapable of creating complicated mechanisms. At that time, Claret had dedicated himself to perfecting striking watches such as minute repeaters and the fabled tourbillon. In fact, it is fair to say that had Claret not come onto the scene, the art of these two mechanisms would have faded into obscurity. Such was Claret's dominance of high watchmaking that at one time, he created the majority of these mechanisms for high-end brands.

Finally, Peter Speake-Marin represents one of the watch industry's most exciting young minds. He is a rare Englishman working amid the predominantly Swiss independent horological scene. Having already worked extensively for Harry Winston, as well as having created the movement for Max Büsser's Horological Machine No. 1, Speake-Marin

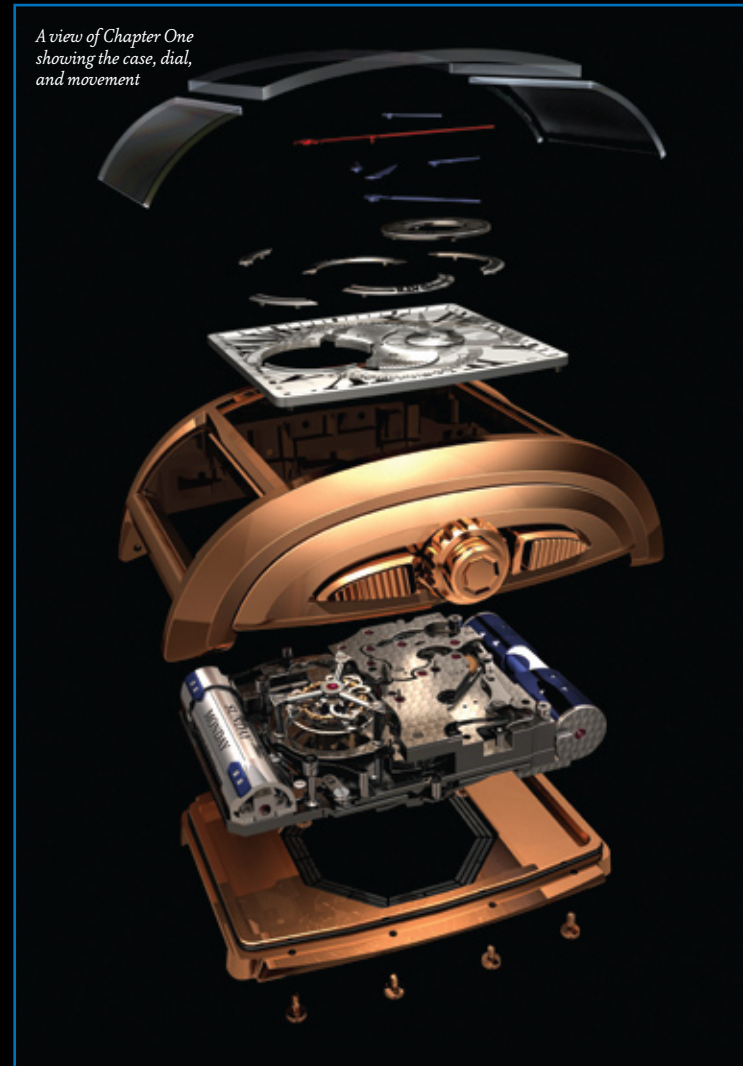
is finishing up work on his own proprietary movement. His watches are reputed to be some of the best finished in the world.

Each of these extraordinary men was immediately compelled by the opportunity Maitres du Temps and Holtzman offered them. "What I love most about Maitres du Temps is the freedom of expression and the artistic possibilities. Here, none of us are tethered to a corporate mandate — we can create with total artistic liberty. Together with Steven Holtzman, I think what we've arrived at is really remarkable — a watch that is both immensely traditional, with a tourbillon monopusher chronograph and retrograde displays for GMT and date, but also something totally new as expressed by the wonderfully engaging roller system that displays the moon phase and the day of the week," says Claret.

Adds Dubuis, "It really is a marvelous project and a wonderful first watch. What I'm most proud of is that this watch perfectly embodies the virtues of real watchmaking. We exist, at the moment, in a period of success in high watchmaking, but also in an era with too many gimmicks and too much marketing. What you see in Chapter One is a watch that, I feel, will go down as one of the great works in real watchmaking."



A close-up view of Chapter One's lower roller, which shows the days of the week



A view of Chapter One showing the case, dial, and movement



The dial side of Chapter One's movement



The back of Chapter One's movement

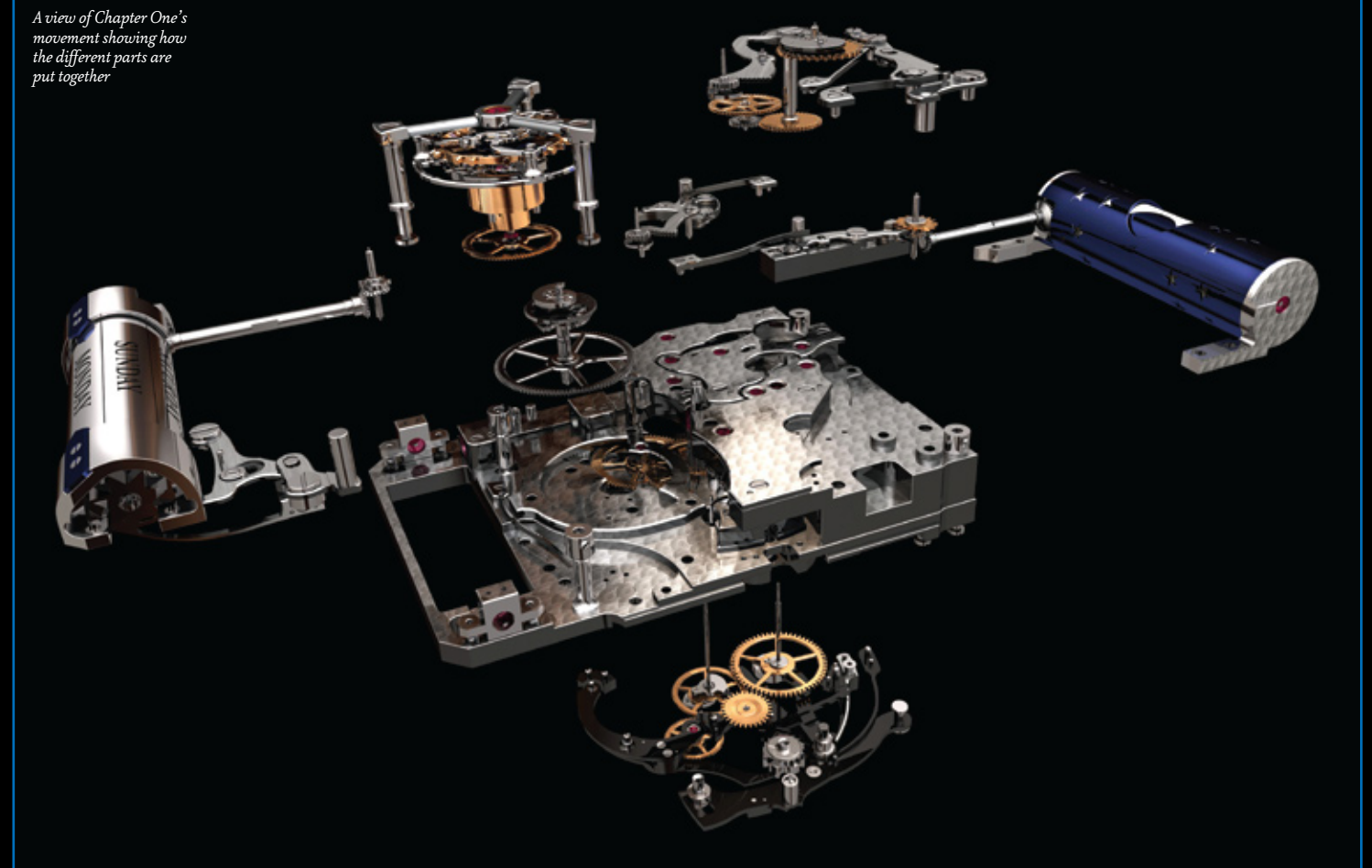


The caseback of Chapter One, where the Maitres du Temps creed is engraved

"HERE [AT MAÎTRES DU TEMPS], NONE OF US ARE TETHERED TO A CORPORATE MANDATE — WE CAN CREATE WITH TOTAL ARTISTIC LIBERTY"

CHAPTER ONE — THE WATCH In Maitres du Temps' first overture, aptly named Chapter One, 558 hand-finished components and a sublime compound curved case conspire to create a horological masterpiece that unites classic Swiss watchmaking with an enthralling new roller display system.

The movement's many levels of heady complication begin with a tourbillon regulator. Patented in 1801 by Abraham-Louis Breguet, this system places all the oscillating components of the watch's heart inside a cage that rotates on its own axis every minute to average out errors caused by gravity's effect on these components. Note that, in Chapter One, the tourbillon is fixed to the movement using a perfectly black polished bridge. Black polish, or *spéculaire*, is a technique whereby metal is polished to such perfection that it appears black when viewed directly. It is notoriously difficult to achieve a black polished finish on rounded surfaces like that on the three arms of the bridge. Incidentally, each of these arms represents one of the three incredible watchmakers involved in the project. The symbolism of the three arms is echoed again in the bridge of the tourbillon, which evokes the image of a tree — the brand's signature motif. As Holtzman puts it, "Each new chapter



A view of Chapter One's movement showing how the different parts are put together

The elegance, innovative indications, and ergonomic functions of Chapter One belie an incredible complexity of movement



Compound curves traverse the case, imparting a sense of nobility and power



when I created the brand that we had to bring something new to watchmaking with every watch we achieved.”

Adds Speake-Marin, “New design and manufacturing technologies allowed fresh scope for different forms that were totally unimaginable ten years ago. The roller system created in this watch is a perfect testament to this.”

As a final design flourish, the chamber between the roller and the main dial features a window to allow light to perfectly illuminate the pulsating tourbillon heart of this masterpiece.

GLOBAL RESPONSE So far, it seems that watch enthusiasts and collectors all around the world agree with Maitres du

back to zero. When adding to these two very large-sized rollers, we had to be very careful to make the rollers as light as conceivably possible. As a result, the two rollers for day and for moon phase are formed out of aerospace-grade aluminum. They are subsequently engraved using laser technology and then hand decorated.”

Continues Holtzman, “When creating these watches, we simultaneously gave respect to classic watchmaking, which you can see in the flawless finish of the movement and traditional complications like the tourbillon. At the same time, we embraced the most modern technology available to create the system of the roller displays and their drive shafts. I decided

Temps, as the response to its new philosophy in high-end watchmaking has been unprecedented. Crowds gathered during the brand’s Geneva launch to pay tribute to the watchmaking legends that have united to create this astonishing new chapter in watchmaking history. During Maitres du Temps’ Asia tour, some of the region’s most mature watch collectors were surprised and delighted to find a work of artistic perfection that resonated with the souls of the artisans involved. And the very first Chapter One watch was sold at Wynn Las Vegas, just moments after it was unveiled, attesting to the brilliance of a timepiece befitting of its creators, the makers of independent watchmaking history. ★

“I DECIDED THAT IT [CHAPTER ONE] SHOULD BE SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU DREAM THE WAY YOU DID WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD”

displays necessitate their own curved sapphire crystals, thus enhancing the difficulty in rendering the watch’s many vast components.

Interestingly, the concept for the signature roller system on the Maitres du Temps watch did not come from the three watchmakers involved but from Holtzman. He

explains, “The idea came from a watch I had as a child, which had these types of rollers that you operated manually, as they were not synchronized to the movement. But I loved this method of displaying information, as it reminded me of an ancient time machine that could have been dreamt up by Jules Verne. When we were conceptualizing Chapter One, I asked myself what the most important element of a modern complicated watch was. I decided that it should be something that makes you dream the way you did when you were a child.”

Relates Claret, “The idea was immediately embraced by us, as it represented a wonderfully original way to display time indications. But technically speaking, transforming Steven’s dream into a reality was an immensely difficult achievement.”

How are these rollers bearing the moon phase and day display synchronized with the movement? Through tiny drive shafts synchronized to the watch’s drive train. Speake-Marin explains, “We were extremely conscientious of power. Here, we already have a movement that is driving a tourbillon, a chronograph, as well as two retrograde displays. So what we didn’t want was a movement that showed a wide change in amplitude every time the chronograph was activated or the GMT indicators jumped

is a new branch of that, and the watch is the fruit of the watchmakers’ imagination.”

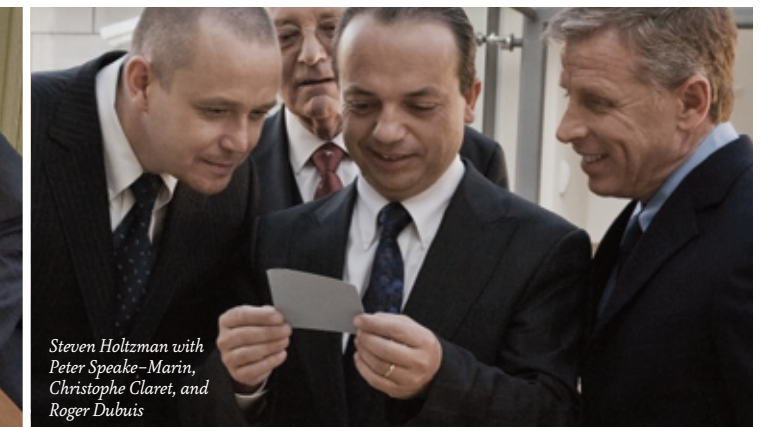
Framed within the tourbillon cage is the glucydr balance wheel of the watch that oscillates in an ethereal ballet at the rate of 21,600 vibrations per hour. The watch also features a sublime column-wheel-activated monopusher chronograph. Each of the start/stop and reset functions is achieved by activating the pusher co-axially mounted into the watch’s crown. A retrograde display for the date is located at three o’clock, while a retrograde GMT display in 24-hour format is located at nine o’clock.

Four pushers are located on the case. The pusher at the upper left is for GMT, the lower left for the moon phase indicator, the upper right for the date, and the lower right for the day. Each of these pushers can be locked against accidental activation using the flush-mounted safety mechanisms. Holtzman says he “wanted to make this watch easy and totally intuitive to set. You do not need any extra tools like pusher pins, etc.” The crown of the watch is pulled out to set the time and pushed in to wind the watch.

The upper part of the watch frames the first roller, which displays the phase of the moon set against a stunning blue anodized sky. The lower roller features a display for the days of the week. Note that both these



The three watchmakers exploring different ways in which the design of Chapter One could be executed.



Steven Holtzman with Peter Speake-Marin, Christophe Claret, and Roger Dubuis



Peter Speake-Marin discusses the intricacies of Chapter One



Roger Dubuis examines Chapter One