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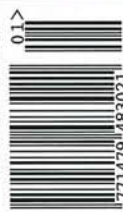
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The Chapter One Round, designed by Christophe Claret and Peter Speake-Marin is uniquely made from 558 components and features a tourbillon movement and a monopusher column wheel chronograph.

After years of working in the watch industry, Steven Holtzman finally set up his own company, Maîtres du Temps, in 2005 with the aim of developing high-end timepieces through collaborations with master watchmakers. The brand has so far worked with Christophe Claret, Daniel Roth and Peter Speake-Marin on its various 'Chapters'. **Tracey Llewellyn**



Steven Holtzman, founder of Maîtres du Temps, the brand which brings together some of the world's greatest watchmakers.

Q. For QP readers who don't know your background, tell us a bit about yourself?

A. I have been in the watch world for about 30 years, mainly on the sales and marketing side of things. I started working for smaller, lower-end brands and worked my way up – both in terms of company size and industry standing. The last brand I worked for was Roger Dubuis, this was in 2005.

Q. How did you make the jump to your own brand?

A. I would say it was more of an evolution rather than a jump, as I started to think about creating my own brand many years ago. Building on my experience and with my connections in the business, I was inspired to be a part of the industry in a more significant way.

Q. You must have been thinking about the product for some time before though?

A. I had a vague idea of what I wanted to achieve – basically something that wasn't available at the time, something new. I have always loved the rectangular shape and the dichotomy of using this to tell the time when convention dictates that a watch should be round. And this is when I initially came up with the idea of using rollers.

When it came to finding watchmakers to work with, I started by picking the brains of QP contributor Ian Skellern. Ian has a passion for independent companies and also knows what is what when it comes to the greatest and most inventive watchmakers of our day. Ian's main piece of advice was to get out there and actually meet the watchmakers. After our initial chat I left him with a list of about 30 of the most specialised craftsmen in watchmaking and then I began the job of introducing myself and discussing my ideas.

Q. You mentioned the rollers – a staple in all of your pieces. What was the idea behind using them?

A. I knew I needed one consistent element to run throughout the watches that I was going to create – not so much a gimmick, more a signature. So many of the big brands make the mistake of trying to be all things to all people but in the long run it just weakens the brand and removes any individualism and identity. For me the hook was the rollers. The watchmakers I spoke with liked the idea of using the cylinders, it is such a simple idea, rather like the old desk calendars from the 1940s and 1950s that we see in the classic black and white Hollywood movies.

Q. Did you ever consider employing in-house watchmakers?

A. I did think about having a team of watchmakers in the beginning – in a similar way to other manufacturers – but all the masters I was talking to kept telling me that it wasn't the best way to work. They insisted that you only need one or two men to make a watch and that putting together any more than this would create problems – a case of too many cooks. True enough, most watchmakers that I have met are very private and reserved people and not really that big on the team thing. So I made a decision very early on to work with one or two watchmakers per Chapter, a different pair each time to allow that element of change and difference that people want.

Q. Who have you worked with to date?

A. On Chapter One it was Peter Speake-Marin and Christophe Claret. The watch is a world-first combination of complications – a tourbillon with monopusher column wheel chronograph, retrograde date, and retrograde GMT, as well as the moonphase and day of the week on rolling bars – and crafted from 558 components.

For Chapter Two it was Peter and Daniel Roth. To obtain the most efficient and reliable system possible for the watch's groundbreaking movement, the mechanism for driving the rollers demanded a novel solution. The instantaneous change of both rollers attests to its success.



Maîtres du Temps' Chapter One comes in white gold, red gold or titanium with options for a black, silver or black/red dial.



Phase of the moon and day of the week indications are displayed on their own distinctive rolling bars on the Chapter One, which has a 60-hour power reserve.



Q. So what is the Maîtres du Temps philosophy?

A. The idea behind the company is that watchmaking can evolve organically according to customer's desires. I want to put watchmakers together with clients. It is important to remember that Maître du Temps started with an idea rather than a movement. I travelled to the top 100 watch stores in the world and asked retailers and customers what they thought a watch should be, what they actually wanted from a timepiece. I collected this information and took it back to the watchmakers. The result was that I knew I had got it right from the get go. Other companies take feedback on products after they have been launched and use it to make tweaks and improvements. This seems to me to be the wrong way round.

Q. You've been relatively quiet of late, are there lots of projects in the pipeline?

A. The next 12 months or so will see four or five new projects coming to fruition. Our next Chapter will be introduced and it will be a round watch so obviously using the rollers will be harder than with previous models. Kari Voutilainen has made the movement and has had to make the entire thing from scratch – luckily the man is a total genius. Andreas Strehler is also on board with the project. It will be a kind of complication-on-demand piece with rollers that jump out at the touch of a button. I don't want to say too much more, you will just have to wait and see.

Another very exciting project that we are currently working on is a women's watch made by a female watchmaker. Again I can't say too much but if all goes to plan it is likely to launch at Baselworld 2013. Watch this space...

Q. It sounds as though there will be more than one new launch from you in 2012?

A. I started the company in 2005 and worked pretty much flat out after that. In 2010 I took a break, which meant that no new pieces were released in 2010 or 2011, however, there were several projects already in development – all at different stages. These are the ones that are almost ready for market.

Q. How many pieces does Maîtres du Temps produce in a typical year?

A. Only about 250 but we are at a very important price point. To date we have 22 outlets worldwide, but we are aiming to open more – London is a city we are very interested in, which is why SalonQP was so important to us, meeting both UK watch lovers and retailers.

Q. With the Maîtres du Temps family getting bigger, does that mean an end of production of the older watches?

A. Absolutely not. Chapters One and Two – and Chapter Three when it is launched – will all remain in continuous production.

Further information: www.maitresdutemps.com

The Chapter Two features a big date triple calendar and with the roller indications claims to be the world's most legible mechanical calendar wristwatch. The brainchild of Peter Speake-Marin and Daniel Roth, this timepiece comes in red or white gold with options for a chocolate brown, blue or silver dial.

