

THE TRUTH

IF IT WEREN'T FOR GREAT DESIGN PEOPLE WOULDN'T BUY WATCHES. IT'S AS SIMPLE AS THAT. AND YET SEVERAL WATCH COMPANIES STUBBORNLY CLAIM THAT THEY MAKE EVERYTHING IN-HOUSE, FROM A TO Z, EVEN IF THEY HAVE USED AN EXTERNAL FREELANCE DESIGNER. INCREASED TRANSPARENCY HAS BEEN A BUZZWORD OF LATE. WE DECIDED TO LET THE DESIGNERS ENJOY THE LIMELIGHT THEY DESERVE. MEET TWO OF TODAY'S TOP TALENTS.

WORDS AND PHOTO ANDERS MODIG

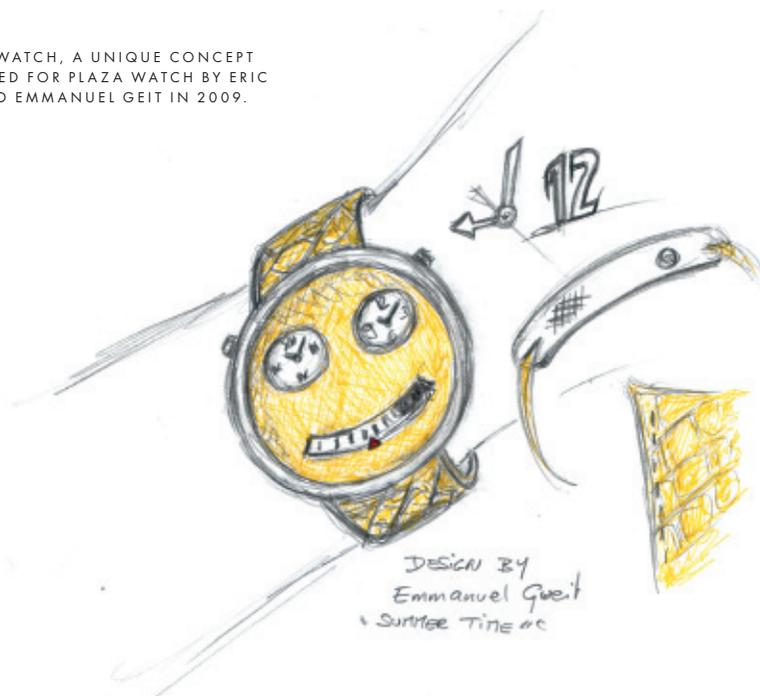


Name: Emmanuel "Manu" Geit
Profession: Freelance watch designer
Age: 42
CV includes: Audemars Piguet, Franc Vila, Fossil, Diesel, Armani, Custo Barcelona, Kenzo, Goldvish cell phones, Plaza Watch

Name: Eric Giroud
Profession: Freelance watch designer
Age: 45
CV includes: Harry Winston, MB&F, MCT (Manufacture Contemporaine du Temps), Rebellion, Universal Geneve, Bertolucci, Swarovski, Plaza Watch



THE SMILEY WATCH, A UNIQUE CONCEPT WATCH CREATED FOR PLAZA WATCH BY ERIC GIROUD AND EMMANUEL GEIT IN 2009.



Plaza Watch (PW): How would you describe a day at work?

Eric Giroud (E): Being a watch designer is very lonely work. You are working every day, almost like in a monastery, getting up at 6 o'clock. You reflect over the design alone, and for most of the work you are alone with your own thoughts.

Emanuel "Manu" Geit (M): I agree, it is lonely. But I share an office with 2 architects; it is good for me to meet people.

PW: Why don't you have any employees?

M: I don't want to hire people. Clients want me to do the work if they hire me. It is hard to translate my ideas to someone else.

E: And it is also not fair to force a young designer, to tell him what to do. If we did have staff, maybe the clients would say no. We have such an intimate relationship with the customer. I could take on more work if I had staff, but I love working alone.

M: I agree. When you work alone you can do what you want.

E: You don't need a boss. When I was working as an architect I had four people employed. Then I had to spend so much time to check on them, to make sure that they did what they were supposed to do.

M: If you have staff you can't be as good.

PW: Why not?

M: Because then you have to spend so much time fishing for clients. Then your design won't be the same quality.

PW: How would you describe your relation to the watchmakers?

E: I like working close with the watchmakers.

Thanks to my architecture background I am very technically oriented. And I always try to establish a very intimate relationship between the brand, the watchmaker and me. The work relation depends on the brand – with a brand like Swarovski, of course, you don't need to involve a watchmaker. But with Rebellion, MCT or MB&F it is very important to get a feeling for each other, to establish a direct contact and think three-dimensionally.

What is your relation to the technique of the movement?

E: I love it!

M: I hate it!

PW: What does a design brief normally look like?

M: Some are very detailed. Some give you nothing; they trust your vision of the brand's future. As a designer you must look at the history of a brand, you must come up with what is missing. Our work is very marketing related. I love this part of the work, to study the brand and really get into the DNA. Whether it is high-end or fashion it is always interesting.

E: My research is different since I mostly work with new brands. There is no history – we make it. It is amazing when we build a brief around a table in a friendly atmosphere. It is like when you are young and you have a rock group, sometimes you go more Allman Brothers, sometimes you go more punk. With Harry Winston it was different again, since they build a new story every year around the Opus.

M: Yes, if that feeling works it becomes super creative. If I don't get a feeling for the people – it has happened three or four times – I say no to the col-

laboration. They were big, interesting projects with big brands. But I feel lucky that I said no to these projects.

PW: What have been your favourite projects so far?

E: I can't choose. Harry Winston was amazing, I was so happy when they called me! Swarovski was amazing, MCT and MB&F also. I love all of my projects; I can't make a top ten list.

M: For me it is Harry Winston, my father designed the first Harry Winston watch, and I did the new generation, the Z1. And of course, for me Audemars Piguet is very important. 13 years ago I designed the first Royal Oak offshore, and it still feels like a strong design.

PW: Several brands that you have worked for will never admit that you made the design; you had to sign a confidential agreement. How do you feel about that?

M: It doesn't matter. But I charge more when I can't put my name on it, when it is confidential.

E: Many brands can't speak about the fact that they use external designers and other people. They want the public to have the image that everything in the watch industry comes from the watchmaker.

PW: How do you think that the financial crisis will affect watch design?

E: A crisis can be good; people become creative when times are difficult. But I don't know what result we will see from this crisis. For me personally the crisis is not a problem, I have work. But many of my colleagues are struggling. Over the last 2–3 years we have seen a lot of creativity, but I found



this last year less exciting in general.

M: It doesn't affect design now. Unfortunately. When times are good the brands ask for special things. Now when there is a crisis they become afraid, they just put on a new dial, a new strap. But when it's tough, that's when you need new creative things – if the brands would dare to present more creative designs the crisis would not be as big!

Manu, in other interviews you have said that you really respect the design of the Chanel J12.

M: Yes, what Chanel's late artistic director Jacques Helleu did, to mix the look of a Rolex submariner with the ceramics of Rado, and adding the black and white expression that is Chanel was simply brilliant. And it feels so good to wear. When I saw it eight years ago I realised this watch would be a huge success in the new millennium. It is a great marketing product.

PW: And now you see many copies of it made by other brands.

M: You always copy the best.

Do you copy people?

M: No, people copy me.

PW: Does size matter?

M: The race to make big watches has been crazy. Big watches are good, but they shouldn't be too big – a 53-millimetre diameter is verging on stupid. People like big watches, but they can also be slim. And I think maybe we will see a comeback of medium-sized watches, but with stones. In general I must say that too many watches are designed for 45-70 year-olds. We want younger clients, so we must make younger designs.

PW: Do you think that designers get enough credit for what they do?

M: In the watch industry no. In fashion yes, but it is also because of money, we can't charge the same as Galliano.

E: The watch industry listens to the market too much. It is not like fashion where the designers tell the market what to wear. But it is changing, now brands call me to discuss things at an early stage, and I feel lucky to have arrived in this position.

M: You must know about the watch industry to become a good watch designer. A lot of fresh guys look at watches like any product. But you need the passion for watches to achieve a good result. At Fossil I had to teach 10 young guys from design school in Texas that a watch is not a copy product. Also you must be able to think ahead – you must have the vision two years ahead, you must know the brands and what they have done in the past. You must trust your instinct. I had no clue 15 years ago

that big watches would become the thing; I just felt that it was cool, and I went with my instinct.

PW: Both of you work with so many different brands. Isn't it dangerous to spread out too much?

M: No, it is great to work with platinum one day, plastic the next. But you must separate your work.

E: That's the job. Monday cheap, Tuesday high-end. I love travelling the different levels of the industry and making something different every year.

M: It is very refreshing, and that is the best thing about being freelance.

PW: What is good watch design?

M: Simplicity. That's why I don't believe in AP of today and Hublot in the long run. The first Royal Oak from AP 35 years ago designed by Gerald Genta is still the best.

E: Simplicity – that's a good answer. And good research makes a good design. And as a designer you must remember that the watch you design must sell in the end. That's why I do a lot of research in the shops. Many of the cool watches you see in the magazines, they don't sell! Many customers want classical watches, so you must find a balance.

PW: Where else do you go for inspiration?

M: The internet is also a good research tool. Window-shopping, fashion magazines, looking at people, looking at shapes. I travel a lot, and I get a lot of ideas from just sitting on a terrace watching people.

E: Every project is different. But it is also like classical music – very mathematic. When you learn these mathematical rules you are liberated. It is like when you learn to drive a car – first you must learn the skills and know the rules, then a car becomes freedom. It is the same when you design and build a watch.

PW: What do you think about watches that are not delivered for years, sometimes never, even though the brands promise them?

M: It is bullshit, and the crisis is here partly because of them. Suppliers are not paid for their work with concepts. If you say that it is just a pure concept, like they often do in the car industry, and sometimes also with watches, it is fine. But you shouldn't introduce it as a product on the market if it doesn't work.

E: There is also a tricky relationship between the press and the brands. The press are like dogs on heat, desperate for news. MB&F solved this in a clever way: First they presented a press teaser, and then they delivered the finished product shortly thereafter. If you see a watch in a magazine you want to be able to buy it now, not wait for years! And I don't like it when they are stressing it so

much, so that you even get 3-d images on the covers of magazines. The magazines and the brands can't wait even to photograph it – even though it won't be available in the stores for years.

PW: What is your view on tourbillons?

E: Today a tourbillon is simple to make. It is very good business. All the people that make tourbillons are rich. But not all tourbillon watches are nice. You must really have a good design to make the tourbillon sexy. Christophe Claret is very good at this.

M: I think the crisis will clean up brands and products. It will be good for the good, bad for the bad.

M: And I can't understand what some brands are up to. Like Cartier, they take one of each model and put a tourbillon in it and call it news and high horology? Come on. Cartier is a jeweller, not a watchmaker. They are brilliant at other things; they have better things to do than making tourbillons!

E: Not many brands want to make new complications. That's why they go on with interpretations of Breguet's old invention. Two of the most creative brands of today I think are De Bethune and Urwerk. They represent true evolution; they make new creations with every new watch.

M: They watch industry needs to be more daring; creativity has been sleeping for 10–15 years. They need to make new things, not copy. Look at Breguet, why do they put a rubber strap on their watches? Only because all the other brands do. That is not Breguet; they should draw from their fantastic heritage of invention. Let's remember that the clients want novelties. And those novelties can be crazy and still be simple.

PW: Today all the brands are going crazy with mixing materials.

M: Everybody screams about mix this and fusion that, rubber and plastic and details everywhere. People get tired of this.

E: I think there will be less of mixing materials. Clean, new materials will still be hot, but not mixing them. You must also think about why you want a new material. Titanium is good because of its structural properties; it makes sense to use it. And carbon fibre is very interesting for its strong, lightweight properties. For instance it can be good for a sporty case, but it doesn't make sense to use it for a dial!

M: But carbon fibre for a brand like AP? Their carbon fibre watches look like plastic but they are super expensive! Carbon fibre is great for a brand like Technomarine. One of the strange materials I have used, silicon, I used because it fixes the colour and because it is not UV sensitive.

PW: What is your favourite complication?

M: Three hands.

E: For me it is always the next one.



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