

HARRY WINSTON

OPUS 9

TEXT JACK FORSTER The Opus series of watches from Harry Winston have been, since their inception, a collaboration between the manufacturing and design resources of Harry Winston, and the vision of some of modern horology's most distinguished designers. Opus 9, however, says Harry Winston's vice president of international watch and jewelry sales David Gouten, is, "in a sense, the first Opus watch that is purely Harry Winston."

The observation reflects the involvement of two men — Eric Giroud and Jean-Marc Wiederrecht — both of whom have a longstanding relationship with Harry Winston. Thus, even though Opus 9 is a continuation of the Opus series tradition of creating a watch that is aesthetically unique and technically sophisticated, it also represents a break with what, until now, has been a tradition of bringing in a new creative collaborator for each Opus watch.

Eric Giroud, the designer behind Opus 9, is one of the most fertile and ubiquitous designers in the industry, whose energy seems matched only by his imagination. One of his best-known designs for Harry Winston is the Tourbillon Glissière, with its two gliding platinum ingot winding masses, side-by-side arrangement of the tourbillon carriage and going barrel, and linear power reserve indicator. In a foreshadowing of the design of Opus 9, the Tourbillon Glissière not only played symmetry against asymmetry, but also used curved sapphire crystal to create a more open vision of the timepiece — a strategy which would be deployed to dramatic effect in the Opus 9 project.

Jean-Marc Wiederrecht's role is that of the realizer of the designer's vision. He's perhaps best known for his mastery of retrograde complications and the subtle engineering of innovations that make them reliable adornments to a watch rather than a source of frustration to the owner (he is the inventor of a unique split gear tooth profile which allows for optimum engagement of gear teeth



Khaki dress, plum acrylic floral cluster necklace, and gold heels, all Burberry. Sunglasses, Louis Vuitton. 2.55 handbag, Chanel

DESIGNER'S SUPERSTAR



without either backlash or binding), and like Giroud, his contributions to Harry Winston's horological projects are longstanding. One of his most notable was also his earliest — the 1989 collaboration which produced Harry Winston's first timepiece, the Excenter Perpetual Calendar.

It's no surprise, therefore, that bringing the visionary designer and the ingenious constructor together would produce something remarkable, and Opus 9 is a watch that is, indeed, a very pure expression of Harry Winston's watchmaking ethos — the timepiece is inconceivable as anything other than a Harry Winston creation and is immediately recognizable as such. But it is also an instance of collaboration in the truest sense, where the complementary skills of each contributor work together to produce a beautifully integrated final result which neither, on their own, would have envisioned.

The Opus 9 is a large watch. Its dimensions are impressive — 56mm from top to bottom of the ellipsoidal case, and 20mm thick. The question, however, as always with any design, is whether the dimensions suit the proportions of the design, and here, the Opus 9 succeeds admirably. The method for displaying the time is both simple and elegant — two tracks of diamonds, with single garnets used to indicate the actual time, run parallel to each other, separated by a gold bridge which both stabilizes the case physically and acts as an attachment point for the strap. To stabilize the case with a strong central component that also acts as a visual anchor for the design was a necessity, as almost the entire remainder of the case is not metal but sapphire. The entire movement floats inside two flattened synthetic sapphire tubes, joined and stabilized at the center by the massive gold bridge, and at the flanks by bevel-edged flat plates which hold the movement inside the sapphire tube itself.

While the telling of time with diamonds and garnets along parallel tracks is a genuinely Harry Winston-esque conception and, in itself, attractive in an almost belle époque way (a subtle touch reinforced by the elegant serif font chosen for the numbers on either side of the moving diamond tracks), it is the optical effect of the movement floating within the sapphire tubes that is the most striking quality of the watch, and one which, unfortunately, makes the watch almost impossible to properly appreciate in photographs, which simply fail to do due justice to the space and depth that the design creates.

The size of the design, therefore, is essential to the visual and tactile effect achieved by the watch. Heft there certainly is in abundance — you just can't put that much white gold on the wrist, even relieved with the empty volume created by the floating movement construction, without creating a certain palpable physical presence — but the weight plays extremely effectively against the negative visual space and the two radiant lines of light that divide the front of the watch into precise thirds, and it is difficult to imagine that the design would have had the impact it does, had it been executed to a smaller scale. In any case, doing things big is part of the exuberant joie de vivre that's at the core of the Harry Winston vision — and not just doing things big, but beautiful as well.

