



SEAN LI (text)

# HARRY WINSTON OPUS 9

Harry Winston's latest Opus mixes  
linear time with diamonds

For the past few years, Harry Winston has consistently stunned horological aficionados with its Opus line of watches. Starting in 2001, in partnership with some of the leading movement creators and designers in the industry, a series of unique timepieces has been created and augmented each year. This time, it's Jean-Marc Wiederrecht and Eric Giroud's turn to present Opus 9 with Harry Winston.

The Opus series has become a signature piece for Harry Winston's watch division, which has grown from 29 employees in 2001 to over 100 today. They were also heavily focused on jewelry timepieces with simple quartz movements, accounting for the time for 85 percent of their sales; this has now changed to a 50/50 mix between the quartz jewelry pieces and the mechanical watches. The Opus series was a way for Harry Winston to build on the natural linkage between jewelry and horology, and to embark on some "crazy, and occasionally risky projects," says David Gouten, vice president of international wholesale for timepieces and jewelry. As a result, Harry Winston has grown

up, and the Opus watch presented each year has become the highlight of each year's novelties.

This brings us to the Opus 9, their latest creation. It's a project that was done in a very short period of time (less than one year!), in partnership with Jean-Marc Wiederrecht, the technical brain, and Eric Giroud, a designer who had previously contributed to Harry Winston's Avenue Square and their Tourbillon Glissière. It's actually the first time that Harry Winston worked with both a watchmaker and a designer for the Opus, since they had traditionally partnered with only one creator per watch.

At the beginning, Mr Wiederrecht presented his idea for Opus 9, but felt that it wasn't technical enough, and wanted to add another complication or two. However, Harry Winston felt that the design should stand for itself. This is not to say that the technology behind the Opus 9 is, by any definition of the word, "easy." It takes a great deal of know-how to take what was originally a retrograde movement, and to stretch it out into the Opus 9 implementation.



The Opus 9 has a retrograde movement that displays the time using two diamond chains

In addition, the case design brought some significant challenges. The construction is actually two sapphire "tubes" that are brought together around the central movement and connected to a structural bridge. Given that it's not a standard shape, it took some time to source the right shape and quality. Harry Winston then used their expertise in working with precious metals to develop and produce the watch's white gold case themselves. They did consider platinum at one point, but felt that the case, which is 10 percent larger than the Avenue Square, would have been too heavy on the wrist. It would have also affected water resistance as platinum is a softer metal; you would not necessarily expect that the Opus 9 is in fact water resistant to 30 meters.

While the Opus 9 is indeed a large piece, it sits very well on the wrist. The time is displayed via two parallel diamond chains, for hours and minutes, each composed of 33 baguette-cut diamonds and three mandarin garnets. In all, the diamonds weigh more than two carats. The time is read according to the position of the garnets. The chains themselves are made of brass – to minimize friction – and the diamond setting is done at AGENHOR, Jean-Marc Wiederrecht's company, as it is a critical mechanical part of the watch. On the surface, the Opus 9 seems relatively simple, but it does take a great deal of ingenuity and precision to, first of all, transfer the usual rotational power into a linear display. The chains need to be precisely calibrated to ensure accuracy and a smooth motion, the diamonds themselves



Opus 9 designer Eric Giroud (right) with watchmaker Jean-Marc Wiederrecht (left)

adding a new level of complexity due to the added weight and the necessity to maintain the stones' brilliance.

Turn the Opus 9 over, and you will observe that the sapphire case allows you to see the chain on the other side as well. The names of the three collaborators, Harry Winston, Jean-Marc Wiederrecht and Eric Giroud, are also shown on the back to reinforce the spirit of partnership that is inherent to the Opus projects. It's part of, as David Gouten calls it, "a human adventure." Each Opus allows Harry Winston to explore an association with different watchmakers and designers. Without divulging any details, Mr. Gouten confirms that Opus 10 is indeed being designed now, and that Harry Winston has every intention of keeping the same pace of presenting one new Opus watch presented every year, if possible.

This does mean that certain other projects had to take a back seat this year. The Project Zalium series, another of the key mechanical watches from Harry Winston (using an alloy of aluminum and zirconium specific to Harry Winston), is taking a break in 2009, but they aim to present the Z6 next year. It's part of Harry Winston's philosophy of presenting timepieces that their collectors can obtain in the near future, rather than to present watches that are still closer to the drawing board than to the watchmaker's assembly. Deliveries of the Opus 9 are indeed scheduled to start soon, as the technical challenges have all been fully addressed, and the limited edition of 100 pieces will be finding its way to the Harry Winston salons around the world. Rev•lution congratulates the partnership of Jean-Marc Wiederrecht, Eric Giroud, and Harry Winston for their daring abstraction of time! ★