

Design at MB&F is strictly introspective.

PERSONAL EFFECTS

“FOR 15 YEARS IN THE WATCH INDUSTRY, I’D THOUGHT OF MYSELF AS A CREATOR, [WHEN] IN FACT I’D BEEN AN INTERIOR

decorator,” admits Maximilian Büsser, founder of boutique watchmaker MB&F (Maximilian Büsser and Friends). Büsser came to this humbling realization following an afternoon in Geneva viewing contemporary art with his friend Eric Giroud. Büsser, who at the time was successfully established as managing director of Harry Winston Timepieces, sought input from Giroud, an architect by training and an artist by temperament, on contemporary painting. But at the gallery Giroud preferred, Büsser could only shudder and say that he’d never hang such things in his sitting room. “Who gives a damn about your sitting room?” demanded Giroud.

“Visiting galleries with Eric was a rude wake-up call,” Büsser says. Looking at art from Giroud’s perspective made him realize that he had been approaching watchmaking much as his favorite artists approached painting—simply to please his customers. Within a year, Büsser left Harry Winston to found MB&F, and asked Giroud to be his designer.

At MB&F, Büsser, 41, and Giroud, 43, don’t give a damn about their clients’ wrists. They approach the design of their Horological Machines, most recently the HM2, according to their own standards, drawing on personal references and relying on instinct rather than reason. Giroud, a soft-spoken man deeply imbued with both classical and popular culture, redefined himself as a product designer at the age of 30, finally finding in horology the architectural →

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Raised structures allow the broad case of MB&F's HM2 (\$64,000) to be decidedly thin. A single-axis Haken-shaped rotor on the back (opposite) drives the two dials.

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freedom denied him in buildings. That unconventional background is crucial to the unusual shapes and complex volumes in the Horological Machines. “Most designers work in two dimensions,” says Büsser. “They’re graphic designers, and they concentrate on the dial.” In

MB&F’s HM2 is comprised of more than 450 components.



contrast, Giroud strives for what he calls “structural transparency,” an approach especially apparent in the HM2. “The case is like a Meccano [or Erector set], in which the fabrication is very easy to understand,” Giroud explains.

Having both grown up in the 1970s, the two men found Meccano was a common denominator in their youth, as were sci-fi films in which earthlings travel to distant planets in machines with portholes similar to those framing the HM2’s two dials. Büsser and Giroud consider such visual foundations crucial, and not only because childhood toys and movies are far removed from the classic vocabulary of wristwatch design. Above all, they look back to boyhood for emotional resonances. “The emotions come out of our background, and people respond because of the story,” says Giroud, citing in particular the “double Hakkēn” rotor that has become an MB&F signature.

The rotor’s form is an homage to the battle ax of Japanese comic-book hero Grendizer; Büsser had suggested it as an alternative to a Meccano-like rotor that Giroud had proposed. Typical of their process, each man designed the component on his own in “friendly competition,” and then compared drawings, deciding which they preferred before Giroud created a 3D model on the computer. “We created it to please ourselves,” Büsser says of the rotor—though he might as well be referring to the brand in general, noting that he expects at least 80 percent of those who see his watches to reject them out of hand. “To make a product in this price range with a battle ax is a challenge,” responds Giroud approvingly, pleased by how far his friend has come from the horological equivalent of interior decor.

—JONATHON KEATS

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