

THE ALCHEMIST

BY Y-JEAN MUN-DELSALLE

Believing in the power of fortuitous meetings, it was purely by chance that Eric Giroud stumbled into watch design when a commission arrived on the doorstep of the agency for which he was working. However, what has been even more serendipitous is that he now spends the greater part of his time on the creation of these fascinating timepieces, as the projects keep streaming in, the result of enriching encounters with the right people at the right time. He has succeeded in combining seemingly incongruous base elements into a cohesive whole, injecting his creative magic into the delivery of products that strike gold each time. Formerly an architect, passion and purpose were missing from his work life, so he left his firm behind at the age of 30 and embarked on a journey to Dakar, Senegal, returning to Switzerland 18 months later to delve into different creative professions, including graphic design, packaging and product design. And thus, it would be in the creation of products that he would eventually find his true calling, engaged in a deeply stimulating human adventure.

He says, "Design is an art de vivre that calls for total commitment. It's a vocation of questioning, synthesis and listening, a mise en abîme of sorts. We infuse ourselves in the times; we live and evolve with it. I would add that we navigate between dream and reality, that we keep an adolescent soul in an adult world. Design is thus a playground without limits." So how does he shift quickly from one category of product to another as he moves between brands? He calls himself a "chameleon", able to metamorphose himself according to the needs of the company. Nonetheless, the product is king and his goal is to please the client. He states, "If we work in collusion, the demands of respective styles disappear in favor of the objective." His design studio celebrates its tenth anniversary this year, and the self-professed watch lover and "conceptualizer-dreamer" finds the Swiss watch industry to be an outstanding platform for creation – a place where dreams are realized.

Architecture has permitted Giroud to approach projects with an all-encompassing outlook, teaching him to transform very clear and precise reflections into the construction, assembly and structure of an object. When designing a watch, he presents it from all angles – the front, profile and cross-sections – to visualize the volumes, spaces and proportions easily, exploring how light falls on the object, then quickly moving into three-dimensional computerized images. The discipline has also instructed him to be "wary of the seduction exerted by a drawing". Hence, he says, "I always move very quickly into the realization of life-sized models. Touching and feeling is essential for a watch that must be ergonomic and comfortable to wear on the wrist."

A drawing may be misleading, but

a three-dimensional model requires that you master the object.

The Harry Winston Tourbillon Glissière transforms luxury horology into mechanical art



Combining original design with rare materials, the Harry Winston Avenue B Ebony makes a bold statement

Having worked with the likes of Mido and Tissot, Giroud then came to design ladies' watches, including the likes of the ethereally curved Serena Garbo for Bertolucci, and the bold bangle watch Avenue B Ebony and elegant Avenue C Mini for Harry Winston. However, it would be for his breathtaking design on complicated pieces that he would garner critical acclaim. First, the Oxford Jump Hour with a simple case hiding a complex mechanism – a project he developed with independent creator Peter Speake-Marin, the first person to enlighten him about the beguiling world of watchmaking and who subsequently introduced him to Max Büsler, then the managing director of Harry Winston Rare Timepieces.

This meeting of minds led to the creation of MB&F's radical 3-D machines that tell the time – Horological Machines No. 1 and No. 2, where case and movement were designed in unison from scratch, the result of an open and collaborative spirit. Case and dial makers and movement engineers worked closely together in harmony in an environment that was strictly without limits. "Design is a transverse discipline that leads you to work as a team, with a multiplicity of specialists. I like these encounters, exchanges; they are privileged moments for me. As long as we work based on trust and we respect fixed rules, the progression is thrilling," Giroud discloses. MB&F has left an indelible impression on Giroud, his most rewarding working experience thus far. He relates, "Participating in the creation of a new brand gave me an unprecedented global vision. It was the first time that I had been involved from the conception until the media or retailer presentation, while going through the entire process of realization and manufacture. I have been very touched and enriched by atypical encounters with enthusiasts of all sorts."

But if there was one watch for which he has particular affection, it is the thoroughly modern Tourbillon Glissière with its pure lines and transparency, for it led him to a certain epiphany in terms of cogency between the aesthetic, function and technique of haute horlogerie. He calls the timepiece, which won in the Technical Watch category of the Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève, "innovative, elegant and refined" while fitting into the continuity of an existing line. It is a piece of mechanical art with a linear-configured movement that recalls the wheels, sliding pistons and rails of a steam locomotive in a blurring of motion and form. He mentions that the Tourbillon Glissière and HMI were "realized under ideal conditions in the same way as concept cars in the automotive world, or haute couture in fashion. These are exclusive and innovative watches, filled with fantasy."

Giroud's inspirations stem from the visual arts and music, which are integral to his design approach; they are the wellsprings from which ideas flow forth. reveals, "You must be very inspired

MB&F's Horological Machine No. 2 marries cutting-edge technology with sculptural art, resulting in a playful number where form follows function



"DESIGN IS AN ART DE VIVRE THAT CALLS FOR TOTAL COMMITMENT. IT'S A VOCATION OF QUESTIONING, SYNTHESIS AND LISTENING, A MISE EN ABÎME OF SORTS. WE INFUSE OURSELVES IN THE TIMES; WE LIVE AND EVOLVE WITH IT"

to create watches that are different and stand out. I have two sources of inspiration. It comes first of all from the outside, from brands that feed you with information and signs. Then, it comes from the inside, from research and personal culture. For me, I'm interested in various art forms. I adore listening to and discovering music, lying on a couch if possible. I am an amateur of contemporary art – I visit exhibitions and meet artists. I like to live surrounded by artworks, and I buy them when I can. I also nourish myself through cinema – its stories and the imagination of filmmakers."

These lifelong passions are then manifested in his innovative timepieces, for he divulges, "Music and horology come together in rhythm and harmony. One minute of music provokes in me an emotion of exceptional force. I modestly try



to come closer to it when I create a watch, to touch the senses as deeply as possible. Other than liking the way it looks at the world, contemporary art helps me to question myself, push back my limits, move away from my habits. Its questions stimulate my creativity. Artists have neither limits nor taboos; they dare, even denounce, which is not so common currently. This helps me to create tension and bring new ideas or elements to horology."

And as Giroud brings original concepts to the universe of watch design, he finds the midway point that converges on his objective of coherence, creating timepieces that strike the perfect balance between beauty and functionality – proving that he can indeed perform horological miracles. ★

With its soft, sensual curves, the ultra-feminine Bertolucci Serena Garbo watch matches a round case with an oval dial