


The  
Watch  
Book

2013 / 2014



TOURNEAU

# The Designers of the Round Table

What's happening in design in 2013?  
Who are the designers behind some of the most  
exciting and elegant watches in the world?  
How is the economic climate affecting watch design?  
To find out, *The Watch Book* invited some of the world's  
most acclaimed and active watch designers for  
a round-table discussion.

By Anders Modig  
Photo: Nathan Beck



From top left: Guy Bove, Octavio Garcia, Manuel Romaro,  
Anne Margot, Xavier Perrenoud and Eric Giroud.

## The Cast of Characters

**Who:** Eric Giroud

**What:** Freelance watch designer since 1998, worked previously as an architect.

**Brands:** MB&F, Vacheron Constantin, Van Cleef and Arpels, Harry Winston, Swarovski and others.\*

**Web:** ericgiroud.com

**Who:** Xavier Perrenoud

**What:** Watch designer for twenty years, founded his own office ten years ago. Also teaches at ECAL, at the Master program of luxury and craftsmanship.

**Brands:** Omega, Corum, Calvin Klein, Louis Vuitton, Swarovski and others.\*

**Web:** xjc.ch

**Who:** Anne Margot

**What:** Freelance watch designer since 2001.

**Brands:** Vacheron Constantin, Girard-Perregaux, Longines, Bvlgari, Tissot, Alpina and others.\*

**Web:** annemargot.com

**Who:** Guy Bove

**What:** Design Director. Has held the position since 2010.

**Brand:** Chopard

**Web:** chopard.com

**Who:** Manuel Romaro

**What:** Director at White Group

**Brands:** Maurice Lacroix, Louis Vuitton, RJ-Romain Jerome, TechnoMarine and others.\*

**Web:** white-group.com

**Who:** Octavio Garcia

**What:** Chief Artistic Officer. Has been with the Le Brassus-based brand for ten years.

**Brand:** Audemars Piguet

**Web:** audemarspiguet.com

\*Some of the world's major brands prefer to keep their hiring of external designers confidential.

==== *What 2013 projects stand out in your mind?*

**Anne Margot (AM):** I find designing watches with new technology and materials very interesting, and the work within the vintage trend is also plentiful.

**Guy Bove (GB):** This year the team at Chopard worked on a new Mille Miglia and a very contemporary version of the L.U.C watches. For the first time we put an automatic movement into the Happy Sport collection, which fits well with the collection's twentieth anniversary.

**Octavio Garcia (OG):** My highlight was the Royal Oak Offshore Grand Complication, an important piece for us that underscores the strong spirit of manufacture and craftsmanship for Audemars Piguet. I also worked a lot on our new partnership with Art Basel.

**Xavier Perrenoud (XP):** This year we did some very futuristic projects with new materials, but also very classical models with a vintage feel, sort of reissues of old models that already existed in the brand.

*Vintage revivals – why is this happening in 2013?*

**XP:** It is a general design trend when you look at furniture, decorative objects, and so on. In these other design fields, vintage has been trending for a few years. And, as always, the watch industry is late in the game.

*Are you also being influenced by other general trends in design?*

**Eric Giroud (EG):** I like fashion, especially haute couture; I meet many people in Paris who are art directors in haute couture. But apart from that, I am not influenced by other designs. To be very honest, I hate furniture today; I think it has become very boring, it lacks depth. I prefer to look at movies, listen to music, I also look at other things, meet different people, architects, cooks – anything to create another platform.

*Another platform often mentioned together with watches is art. Audemars Piguet has taken this to a new level by becoming the new sponsor of Art Basel.*

**OG:** The brand has repositioned itself during the past few years and unearthed some of the values that were lost. We need to speak with an overarching message to shed light on all our collections. This whole notion of brand and brand message is becoming more important for us, and that's why art is important.

As for the vintage trend, it has to do with the fact that many of these brands are hundreds of years old. And many of the brands are lucky enough to have champion products, like Speedmasters, Ingenieurs, and Royal Oaks. I think it's relatively natural for companies, particularly during economic downturns, to turn to those champion products and reinforce them. So, what appears to be a trend is actually a natural reflex. I am very thankful that we have a product that has the power to get us through the tough times as well.

**Anne Margot (AM):** I'd go along with that, because in these times the client often seeks a classical image. And it is difficult to make something new with old things, which limits the work of the designers.

**Manuel Romaro (MR):** Watch design is influenced by what is happening in design, fashion, haute couture and jewelry in terms of material and in terms of colors. But most of the time the watch industry only creates trends within its own micro-universe. Among the regular brands, everybody is looking at what the other one is doing. The brands that think out of the box and dare to bring something new are winners; people say, "Wow – they dared to do that!"

**EG:** Yes, it's something I know well because over the last ten years I have designed many very daring watch cases. Opus 9, Opus 11, all the MB&F, some Rebellion ...

In the beginning many people used to look at what I did and wonder if it was a joke. But now when I speak to the same people – who have meanwhile found jobs with the big historical companies, the *maisons* – they all want a bridge between the old and the new. An elegant example of such a bridge is MB&F's Legacy Machine No. 1. This is, of course, a very exciting development that also makes sense – the past decade showed there is a big market and big business for amazing designs and new watchmaking from brands like Richard Mille, Urwerk and De Bethune.

*How is this affecting Chopard?*

**GB:** Well, I think the return to historical models is more important and deeper than just a reflex in shaky times. Companies are actually creating complete collections around historical, iconic models; brands are really focusing on doing what they are good at. And an important way to invest in the roots is the integration of design services as was done at Chopard, IWC and Audemars Piguet, for example. We are actually becoming a contemporary version of artisanal brands, which is very exciting.

*Chopard is a very old brand, your roots go back to 1860.*

**GB:** Yes, but most of the models are not very old. At Chopard we have a very broad range of different collections, but hardly any of the collections existed before the mid-1980s. With the exception of the L.U.C collection, which draws a lot of the inspiration from the old Chopard pocket watches. And since we have our own movement development, we have some movement makers who are more interested in contemporary watches, and others who are, how should I say ... more historically accurate in terms of finishing and decoration. And it is very exciting to be able to design watches for those two different types of movements, with two types of inspiration – modern or vintage.

**XP:** These vintage-inspired collections and the back-to-the-roots trend are a reflex in a crisis. You are alarmed, you have to come up with a product, you have to concentrate your energy on communication with a strong product, so what do you do? You come back to your roots! By the same token, MB&F and other more creative niche companies are making completely new things because it is the only way to be visible on the market. If you want to have a place at the table, you have to make something very exceptional, because the rest of the field is taken by the big groups and the big brands.

**AM:** And you need money. To sell a new product you have to show it, the consumer must get to know it, so you have to put money and energy into advertising. This is something the brands don't always understand when it comes to new watches for women.

*For you, what is the most important watch happening of 2013?*

**AM:** The belief that it is possible to do something very nice for women and to sell as many of them as are made for men.

*Many brands came out with new women's watches in 2013, also with complications.*

**AM:** Asian markets would like to have even more complicated watches for women.

**XP:** Yes, we are also seeing a return to this “reduction for women,” where you reduce the size of a man's watch, put some diamonds and a nice dial on it.

*But brands like Vacheron Constantin, Jaeger-LeCoultre and Patek Philippe are making really beautiful women's watches.*

**EG:** But still the most beautiful women's watches were made in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. But since then? After the war the real watch industry started, and men's watches took over.

**GB:** One of the problems with designing women's watches these days is the greater trend towards mechanical movements.

*What do you mean?*

**GB:** If you start to design a very feminine watch, it is very easy to cross the line and design a watch that will not be considered a “good watch” because of the pre-existing ideas and ideals about mechanical watches. In Japan you often have collectors wearing small, delicate, very feminine watches, but in China you would often have women wearing something a lot more conservative, looking like smaller versions of a man's watch. In Switzerland or in the US you will often see a woman borrowing her husband's or boyfriend's Rolex or Panerai. So, what is a perfect women's watch for them?

**OG:** If the message is too mechanical or too complex, it can be very intimidating for women to even open the door of certain watch boutiques. We've done studies that show that it is men who buy the first watch for their wives or girlfriends. Alternatively, the woman uses her boyfriend's or husband's watch to familiarize herself with watches. So, there is a lot to be done in the communication to women, and of course I am not talking about the exceptions, like women collecting minute repeaters.

**MR:** Yes, we are looking at the development of new ladies' lines. But the briefings are mostly coming from men. Men think they understand women because they have read all the fashion magazines. And then they say “for the ladies we put some diamonds, and a nice pink satin bracelet,” but that is absolutely not how you make a good woman's watch. If you want to design a good women's line you have to respect some proportions and market awareness of what makes a nice watch. And in the end you have to put the same marketing behind it as you do for men's watches.

*Do you have an example?*

The best example of marketing power is one of the major successes in the watch industry: The Chanel J12. They initially designed a watch that had the same case as a Rolex. It was not intended to be feminine in the beginning! After 12 years, the J12 is now at the end of its lifecycle. They did what they could, they spread the collection to the maximum. So, what are they doing now? They are taking a super-feminine product from their existing assortment, the Premiere, and putting a lot of effort and money into marketing. It is now in all the magazines.

*So it's really all about the marketing?*

**MR:** You also have examples of brands that don't have marketing budgets, but then the marketing is coming from the people managing the brand. Take the example of Max Büsser: he is a very smart guy, he has good products, he has a very good network, and then he is doing his business, but the size of the business cannot be compared.

**OG:** This brings us to a broader discussion about brand perception. Because obviously Chanel is a feminine brand par excellence. It is trickier if you have a brand perception that is masculine. You must have the marketing and the right product mix. Some brands have the opposite brand perception challenges. Take Chopard with its men's collections, for example.

**GB:** Actually it depends on who you ask. If you ask the guys with the Mille Miglia, or the women with Happy Diamonds or Happy Sport you get different answers as to whether Chopard is a masculine or feminine brand. But to make an iconic women's watch that is known as a women's watch is tricky. Especially if it is briefed by men or designed by men – as we all know, understanding women is one of the hardest things in life.

**EG:** With women's watches it is important to realize that fashion changes very quickly. If you design fashionable women's watches for exclusive brands, look at the prices ... forget it, they become too expensive. Why not make more cheap watches instead? This market segment can be very energetic, very hip and very interesting. Look at CK, or look at India, where you have Titan watches for ladies. The brand is very creative and very quick. Every three months it releases a new model, and the ladies buy them.

**AM:** I don't agree, I think you can do something very expensive and very attractive for women, especially for the Asian market. When I redesigned the Cat's Eye for Girard-Perregaux, we made very exclusive models with diamonds and sapphires and they sold a lot, it was very successful!

*Let me change directions for a moment. What, for you, are the strongest tendencies or trends of 2013?*

**Everybody:** Security.

**XP:** Security, but I would prefer to say there is no trend this year. Big brands have to create a trend based on their roots and traditions. I think that is the key word for the future: real identity. Don't try to be Rolex if you are not Rolex. Don't try to be Cartier if you are not Cartier. It seems simple, but the most difficult thing is not to do what everybody else is doing. Rolex is setting a good example by deciding not to do the black PVD or ceramics like everybody else.

**MR:** This is possible only if you have the power to stay with what you are. I would say there are only fifteen players out there that have this power. All the others believe they have to follow. But they stand an excellent chance of winning if they just stick to what they are. And we have very good examples of winners among established brands selling for 10–150 million dollars per year, brands like Maurice Lacroix, TechnoMarine and Frédérique Constant. But now they are under pressure because of the concentration into big groups and in distribution. There is a tremendous pressure on the distribution now by Richemont, LVMH and Swatch Group. So, these well-known independent brands are now struggling to get space in the boutiques. Why? Because the groups are saying to the retailers that they will give them five top brands to sell, but with a contract that excludes the competition, and the competing brands are named in the contract. So, new brands coming onto the market will not be able to find retailers.

**AM:** For me, a very strong tendency is that communication is very focused on the investments that have gone into the research on new materials like special gold alloys, for instance Omega Ceragold™ and so on. The new materials are a new door opening. They create a new focus and generate new ideas. Ten years ago ceramic was very new to most brands. Before that it was only used by Rado, which scored a success with it for a long time. But now, for the past five or six years, ceramic has been a success for everybody.

**MR:** Developing a watch with new materials takes time, and if it is with a new movement it will take even longer. So, to talk about trends on a year-by-year basis is very difficult. Trend cycles in watches are longer. And they have to last longer because of the huge investment. That's why it is more interesting to look over longer periods than one year. Take the last ten years of the new conceptual watchmaking from brands like Urwerk and Richard Mille. The watch industry simply can't come with strong trends like that every year, it doesn't have the power. In any case, when a new trend is coming, somebody launches the first watch, and then they are followed by others reacting. Such a trend can last three, five, even ten years. And if the trend is good, and this is what happened with the “new watchmakers,” then it stays. The new watchmakers will last, because they speak to new customers with a new language. It is like architecture or furniture, when you take a major trend that has lasted for years and years, it then becomes a standard or a classic.

*Is this year a strong year for watches from new conceptual watchmakers?*

**MR:** For me, this year, there was “a” watch in this category – Ressence. The maker, Benoît Mintiens, did something completely new with design. It has the same impact on watches as when Marc Newson designed the first Ikepods in the 1990s.

*And for you, Octavio, how has the advent of new materials, affected your designs?*

**OG:** We have always been passionate about experimenting with new materials and alloys. We were among the first to use carbon fiber in the early 2000s, and the Royal Oak Offshore was born twenty-five years ago by mixing rubber and precious materials. When we started using ceramics we didn't want to finish it like most other brands, so we cut it like steel. That takes a lot of energy, time and research. I think the new piece from Omega, the Dark Side of the Moon, has the same kind of approach. It's a real Speedmaster but with lots of new engineering and research. On top of that ceramics is a material that really brings something to the consumer. It is robust and scratch-resistant.

[cont. on page 94]



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5



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3

1 Guy Bove, Design Director of Chopard 2 Manuel Romaro, Director of White Group 3 Anne Margot, freelance watch designer 4 Xavier Perrenoud, freelance watch designer 5 Octavio Garcia, Chief Artistic Officer at Audemars Piguet 6 Eric Giroud, freelance watch designer



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*Do the briefs often demand user-friendliness? Like scratch resistance, or a complicated watch that does not require a Master Degree in Science to handle?*

**XP:** We don't talk enough about that. I think everybody in marketing and design should think more about this.

*You are the designer, you have the power here, don't you?*

**XP:** Well, unless you are working on a new movement you can't do anything about that. Maybe we should think more about how to make a watch more comfortable to use. But it is a topic that nobody talks about.

**EG:** I am very lucky, because a good part of my work is together with the watchmaker, for instance with Jean-Marc Wiederrecht for the new Romain Jerome Spacecraft. Today I work with very big, very old brands. We have a small group of watchmakers inside the brand, and can get a product with a new movement onto the market in two years.

**XP:** That is funny, I have the impression that most brands are going back to existing movements, ones they can trust, without fear of aftersales problems. When you launch a new movement, 95 percent of the time it works, but the remaining five percent can be a real disaster.

**EG:** I don't agree. I get surprisingly many requests from both new and classical brands that want to make new movements. I say, "Are you sure?" and they say, "Yes we need this!"

**AM:** I don't think it is a surprise. Because this year there was nothing, no news for movements.

**EG:** I find that the small brands are driving the development of new movements today.

**OG:** I don't necessarily agree, I think that a lot of energy has been spent by some of the bigger groups. For example, look at silicium, which is changing the game. Companies like Breguet are doing some very interesting things with it. Today movement development is not just about engineering; designers have a voice even within the bigger groups and the big companies. They are looking at ergonomics and how you read and use, for instance, the perpetual calendar. So, I feel that in the near future we will see the impact of design thinking on the interaction between the user and the movement.

*Let's move on to fonts, typefaces. At Chopard you spend a lot of time and effort with this, I know you have even developed your own typefaces. Why do you spend so much time on this?*

**GB:** It is one of the things I have always liked about design. It is the kind of detail that most people don't pay attention to, but a typeface can really shift the overall feeling of a product. Very bold type gives the feeling of being the next new thing. A more vintage typeface gives the feeling that the watch is already older.

*Is this something that your clients often talk about?*

**MR:** It doesn't come from the brands, but we often discuss it with them. That's our value as designers; going deep into details, tenths of millimeters. We all know the importance of the dial, and we have all seen how not having the appropriate font on the dial can lead to failure.

*In this universe of details, do you see anything specific for 2013?*

**EG:** More details! Even the screws. I have had to design special screws for all the brands I have worked for. All the companies need their own hands and crowns for the different collections. But they take it too far – everything that came before is lost.

*This year we are seeing a lot of color.*

**EG:** There are some really boring examples, but I must say that Rolex Day-Date with the green dial and strap is wonderful! And the Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso from last year with the red dial ... if you see it buy it! The original Reverso with a blue dial is also great.

**MR:** When you talk about the color it is not about choosing whether red or orange or green is the right color. In the pantone palette there are tons of colors, so it is about choosing the right red. You must help them along. If you ask a brand to choose a color, 95 percent of the time they'll pick the wrong one. Sometimes they pick a color because the supplier had it already in stock ...

**GB:** This is very designer-centric discussion, everyone around the table will have his or her idea about what the right red is. But it might not be the right red for the brand. When you are working for the brand, you are responsible for what is right for maybe 5,000 pieces, and not what you would want on your own wall. You know one level, but business is business is business, and we have to sell watches at the end of the day.

**XP:** On the other hand, any company should have a corporate color and identity that they try to stick to, instead of just picking up different trends.

**AM:** Yes, sometimes brands change too quickly, too often. I work with a long-term perspective with the design codes of a brand, but often I have to change every three or four years because the CEO changes.

**OG:** That is the nature of the business.

**AM:** Yes, but it is a big, big challenge for us designers.

**MR:** Look at the successful fashion brands like Chanel, Louis Vuitton with Marc Jacobs – they have creative directors who are the guardians of the house. They decide on the colors, shape, the vision of the collection. In the watch business you have product managers who often have no idea about creations, proportions or colors. They don't know if a blue can match a yellow or if green goes well with a purple. Of course you can be a good product manager or director with a good vision for your brand, but you must do your homework or be humble enough to get help from people whose job it is to advise you on such things. Once you have such a person on board, you won't have color problems, font problems, or shape problems.

**OG:** And you don't have decision problems. We had a defined color chart, but people elsewhere in the world mixed their own color, and the brand lost its focus. And because our clients travel around the world, it was important for us to restructure to ensure brand coherence at every customer contact point.

**MR:** That would never happen in fashion, for instance somebody in China asking for a specific color. Today many brands are weak, they go along with it. But if you do that you are lost. You lose your soul, and once it is lost, that's it!

**AM:** A lot of brands decided to make special pieces for different countries, for different markets. But in doing this they failed to respect the brand codes. So I don't think that is the way to go. Many watches can only be distinguished by their presence. I am surprised brands don't respect their origins more.

That's why I like brands that keep something very original, for instance Vacheron Constantin and its *métiers d'art*. Or Van Cleef and Arpels, which does terrific enameling. Or the Cartier mosaics. Maintaining something very old for the very new will surely be one of the approaches in the future.

**XP:** Yes, but on the other hand it is also a trend this year. It was so funny during the SIHH in Geneva. All the brands were using *métiers d'art*, they were all doing enamel and had the same concept in their booths.

**GB:** And these are *métiers* that don't belong to the brands, that's the worst thing.

*So, which are the brands that you feel "deserve" to work with this apart from one of the pioneers, Van Cleef and Arpels?*

**EG:** Vacheron Constantin is maybe the best house for *métiers d'art* today. The last pieces for ladies that it presented at the SIHH are just right. The right color, the right light, the right artists ... the balance is excellent.

**AM:** It is legitimate for the brand. But now a lot of brands are saying, "Okay let's do it because we like what Vacheron Constantin is doing."

**GB:** Whoever does *métiers d'art* well deserves to use these techniques. They are crucial, especially in advancing the market of women's watches.

*A different artisan tool of today is coming into use. 3-D printing is becoming available for everybody. In New York I saw a 3-D printer for \$2,500. How is this affecting your designs?*

**EG:** Every week we send a 3-D file and receive a model, so we work with 3-D printing often.

**GB:** It is very useful to see something on your wrist with the right proportions in order to make the decision if you want to make a metal prototypes or a working piece.

**AM:** I am sure it will change the industry, it is just like the iPhone and photography.

**XP:** Again, it is a tool. It helps; it is a part of a process. It is good to have a volume in the design process. But it is very dangerous to make final decisions with wax prototypes, because most of the time these wax materials absorb the light. And most of the time when designing watches, we work with reflections of light.

**MR:** More and more people in our generation are losing the ability to sketch, and fewer understand sketches. They need a 3-D model to make a decision. This is a shame, because sketching is an important process. When an idea comes from the brain, the brain talks to the hand. Finally, by incorporating knowledge of design you will sell more watches. ■■

*Thanks to: www.fumisterie.ch for hosting this talk.*