



IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME

The title of the famous book by the French novelist Marcel Proust suits totally with some of the most interesting and exclusive watches of our time...

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TIME LOOKS STRICTLY DEFINED... According to the law of physics a second is the time of 9.192.631.770 periods of the radiation of the Cesium 133 atom! While time is definite in such a concrete manner, we experience it subjectively. We all understand that time goes by in different rhythms, depending on our mood and a series of factors. During a trip on train for example, the notion of time is totally different when crossing a valley or cutting through a mountain. Meeting a person we like transforms hours into seconds, while a bad experience turns seconds into centuries. Despite these assumptions we all believe we have a fair notion of time. Time is constantly present in our lives, while we believe that we cannot escape from its power. But who is actually capable of accurately calculating a good night's sleep the moment he opens his eyes?

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF HISTORY man has been keen on time. To begin with, the reason why he began calculating time was his need to organize his life in order to become more efficient and face Nature and his problems. To that end, he initially used the natural environment and its intervals. The movement of the sun and the moon, the changes of seasons and the alternations of agricultural life were the main elements that helped create the calendar which we tend to take for granted.

IT SEEMS WEIRD to believe that time wasn't as important in people's lives as it is today. And truth be told, these days, time dictates our lives entirely. It even dictates our biological needs. We frequently say: "God, it's one o'clock already? I have to eat!"

AS MAN MANAGED TO FIND A WAY to cut time in small "chunks", he then tried to measure it. He first began observing the stars in

the sky or the water level of Nile in Egypt. In Ancient Greece, people manufactured sundials and pierced water cups known as clepsydras.

THE CHURCH KEPT TRACK OF TIME for the first time, tolling the bell every hour. It was an era when the clergy was omnipotent and ruled every possible human activity by being the sole timekeeper. The pocket watch was first introduced in 1500 A.D. and was considered a "revolution" as the notion of personal time appeared. From that moment, people had their "own" time. Wristwatches appeared in isolated cases 140 years ago and were considered a great peculiarity, while today they count just a century of life.

TODAY, AS TIME IS SO ACCURATELY CALCULATED and omnipresent, from our car's dashboard and the mobile phone, to the coffee maker on our kitchen table, watches have emancipated and live beyond their narrow "mission" of keeping time. Needless to say that good and bad moments are not rigorously calculated in seconds. Dawn, morning, midday, afternoon, night. So it goes for our memories. It was early in the morning, when she opened her eyes, when my daughter first called me "dad". Or was it 08:17:43" – but who actually cares?

BEYOND ANY DOUBT, the feeling of time as well as our lives have changed radically in a few decades... Globalization and rapid technological development changed everything just in a few years. We all remember how things were, just 30 years ago, when our life rhythm was totally different; much more "humane", closer to the essence of time, which is purely related to the human organs' rhythm, our breathing, our heartbeat and the movement of the Earth, the Sun or the Moon and far away from the extreme accuracy

of the atomic watch, which will “lose” a second in 400,000,000 years!

THROUGH THAT ABRUPT CHANGE, man lost “himself”. He lost his connection with his social and even family environment. Some decades ago, families used to gather around the dinner table (including aunts, cousins, grandfathers and grandmothers, as they all lived under the same or neighbouring roof) while each member participated actively in the traditional food preparation. Afterwards, they would all help to clean up the kitchen and wash the dishes. Needless to say, that even raw food was another factor of connection with the family, as food was mainly produced in home-owned farms and kitchen gardens.

SO WHAT ABOUT TODAY? Who can actually sit at the dinner table and enjoy a lunch with his family? And who is actually eating traditional home-cooked food as our parents did? Today we hastily eat exotic cuisine from countries thousands of miles away. Who is capable of relating him – or herself with his birthplace and the people who share the same principles, traditions and customs? What about with the same old routine? Living in a globalized village makes it much more difficult to talk to your brother, a high school friend, a relative or a neighbour, than to a friend in another continent! Work has also changed and alienated people from their families and the peaceful life they lived for years. People tend to say that technology “has made our life easy”. Today it is unimaginable not to have a vacuum cleaner, a washing machine, a dryer or even microwave oven. But let’s think for a moment: Have all these “facilities” managed to offer better leisure as they initially promised?



OR HAVE WE ALL ENDED UP being always “off time”? Always delayed, occupied and constantly stressed? How are we actually profiting from technological development? If you use a fast car to drive from Geneva to Paris, you will surely arrive in fewer hours but are you willing to use this “extra time” to

relax by the river Seine or will you presume you can use this spare time to go for shopping and finally arrive late at the hotel, get a quick bath and get dressed for dinner in a rush?

PEOPLE NOWADAYS LIVE IN RIVALRY WITH TIME; time is the absolute ruler and troublemaker. We frequently hear people say they wish they could prolong a 24-hour day or even freeze time, while others want the Earth to stop so they can “get off”! That is why people these days choose to “decelerate” when possible. The “Slow” movement, for instance, was launched in Italy 25 years ago by Carlo Petrini as a way of protesting against the opening of a McDonald’s restaurant in Piazza di Spagna in Rome. He then founded the “Slow Food” organization as an antidote to fast food. Today, this particular organization has more than 800 affiliates all over the world, while terms such as “Slow School” and “Slow Parenting” have appeared in our vocabulary, stressing the need to alleviate our children of the burden of endlessly chasing time.

FURTHERMORE, people use terms such as “Slow Cities”, “Slow Books”, “Slow Travel”, “Slow Art”, etc.! Buddhism is growing rapidly compared to other religions, while yoga has pushed aerobics aside. A growing number of people chose to work fewer hours for less money so as to have more leisure time. We all want for our food and vegetables to grow slower. In other words, our planet has “hits the brakes”!



SO YOU MIGHT ASK, what does this have to do with watchmaking? To put it simply, a watch not only keeps time (as accurately as possible) but it is constantly present at the epicentre of social, sports, political and social life. Thus, this year were presented two unique watches, one of which keeps time “secret” until we ask for it, while the other can help you chose between the normal rhythm of calculating time and a slower or faster one, thus altering... the passage of time! Moreover, there are a couple of other watches that recently emerged as part of this “playful” category, as well as some historical timepieces. But let’s take things from... the end, as this time we’ll avoid the usual historic background and we’ll travel through space back to the old times.

WHEN I STARTED DRAFTING THIS PARTICULAR ARTICLE, I had in mind 7 watches made by 6 different companies. Strikingly enough, I found out that the same watchmaker was the creator of 4 of these pieces! Most of the people, as well as the actual friends of Haute Horlogerie, don’t know that person by name. Still, the real connoisseurs of the secrets of the field are capable of recognizing his worth and craftsmanship. I had no other choice but to contact him, and all of a sudden the “mystery” started magically to unfold!

HIS NAME IS MATHIAS BUTTET and for more than a year he has been the secret weapon in the arsenal of Jean-Claude Biver when Hublot hired all the personnel of BNB Concept, after its bankruptcy in January 2010. Below you’ll find our discussion that of course started from the Key of Time model by Hublot “pervading” the article wholly but also touches upon most of the relative models.

CONSTANTIN STIKAS: *You are the man who conceived, designed and manufactured the MP-02 Key of Time. Would you care to elaborate on that?*

MATHIAS BUTTET: In watchmaking,

even at its finest level, we tend to reproduce movements already manufactured. A Tourbillon, a Minute Repeater, a Perpetual Calendar... Beautiful complications, which I believe have nothing to do with the actual problem of timekeeping. I’m referring to the fact that these days nobody can indeed use his or her time freely. This tendency has become an integral part of our daily lives where we are all used to spending much more time on trivia and negativities rather than on great and merry things! That is why I thought I should create the most “likable” watch ever made, a watch that could offer the user the capacity to live differently beautiful moments compared to bad ones!

NO MATTER WHICH CIVILIZATION we might come from, we can all agree that good things last a short time, while bad ones last much longer. Our objective was to find a way to choose time’s “speed” according to good or bad moments. Key of Time has a “three-gear” time feature! The first one is the conventional one, while the other two can multiply or divide conventional “speed” time by 4! Thus we can transform an hour into a quarter and vice versa!

IN OTHER WORDS, A FATHER CAN SAY to his children on a Sunday morning: “Listen guys we’ll play together for an hour”. By choosing the low speed his watch will count the so-called playtime “hour” in four real hours! We tried to re-establish the feeling that says that time flies when we are having fun! And then, when dad switches his wristwatch back to conventional time and sees those four hours elapsed, well believe me... The world hasn’t come to an end! Is it the first time that he’ll be late? At least this time he did something valuable as he enjoyed playing with his children. On the contrary, a painful hour at the dentist’s can be transformed – through the multiplication of time’s speed – into a quarter of an hour!



— LARGE PHOTO —
Hublot Key Of Time

— A —
Detail of the
magnificent dial

— B —
Mathias Buttet





{ The unique watch by
Confrérie Horlogère }

WE ARE NOT DEALING WITH A TOY, as somebody might initially think. It is an “invitation” to consider that we usually spend too much time on trivial things. So let’s reconsider how we value time. I started thinking about this mechanism when I realized how easily we say to our children, that we cannot afford to spend time to play instead of admitting that we are not in the mood or simply that we want to spend our time on something different. But of course, we would be seen as “monsters”, that is why we prefer to lie. As a consequence, Key of Time is present to remind us all that instead of saying “I’m running out of time” we can opt for “I will find some spare time because it’s important for me!”

THAT WAS ACTUALLY OUR INITIAL IDEA. Later on, with the help of our technical team we finalized the concept by creating an original “gearbox” including “Drive” and “Rear” and through an out of the box brainstorming “Clef du Temps” was born, prior to Key of Time.

C.S.: *Could you describe the (conventional) time framework of your project?*

M.B.: We manufactured the watch’s first edition when we were still working for BNB. It was the first watch for Confrérie Horlogère in the framework of the charity auction Only Watch!, which took place in January 2009. When Hublot hired the BNB watchmaker team we carried in our “suitcases” – amongst other things – “Clef du Temps” and that is how we proceeded and created its new edition that adapted to Hublot’s style. We even had to change many details in the mechanism, as the first model made in 2009 was a unique piece, while today we are creating a limited edition of 50 watches.

THE TOURBILLON IS IN VERTICAL ORDER and it is placed on the bottom of the case, which gives the opportunity to read seconds on the lower part of the case in a similar form to “tact watches”. It wasn’t something difficult for our team, as we had manufactured a similar Tourbillon for Concord Company. (Editor’s note: We sure remember it!)

KEY OF TIME IS THE SECOND CREATION of the Masterpiece Collection that gave us the chance to work beyond the “codes” of Hublot. In that spirit, Jean-Claude Biver made it clear to us that he was not expecting an outcome in line with the company’s spirit like in Big Bang etc. and consequently our R&D team worked freely manufacturing something totally novel.

But let’s interrupt for a second the notorious Mathias to see the two models he already introduced and we’ll catch up later so as to talk about his relation with the other two watches we will present.

THE WATCH BY CONFRÉRIE HORLOGÈRE made a great impression since it was announced in the auction, thus the price reached 280,000 Euros, an amount much larger compared to other important watches made by major companies. Every single part of the watch – even the strap – was original.

WHAT WAS BEYOND anydoubt impressive in this greatly structured, “technical” titanium case were the conception of the mechanism’s function on the one hand, and the impeccable execution of all the details on the other. The conventional time measurement can be multiplied or divided by 2 (while in Hublot’s Key of Time the multiplication or division is by 4). The strap is made of four stainless steel wires covered with rubber!

THE MOVEMENT OF KEY OF TIME has been redesigned. Let’s consider some compelling figures: 512 parts including 74 rubies for Hublot against 364 parts including 47 rubies for Confrérie Horlogère. Additionally, the power reserve in Key of Time is 100 against 80 hours in “Clef du Temps”. The case in the magnificent Hublot is made of titanium grade 5 with DLC (Diamond Like Carbon) coating, while the dial is one of the most impressive, the outcome of an unimaginable architecture. The hands, made of black nickel, have a SuperLuminova green coating, while the strap is made of rubber. The crown at 9 o’clock is used in both watches to select the watch’s “gear”!



The three dials of the
Hermès Cape Cod Grandes Heures.

STRANGE AS IT MIGHT SEEM, the next two watches I'm about to present, belong to Hermès. You heard right! In contrast to what most people believe, i.e., that a watch is simply one more accessory in the collection of Haute Couture brands, there are a few companies from the fashion industry which have a long history in watchmaking and produce watches of great technical interest. Hermès for instance started creating watches well before their well-known silk scarves!

THE WATCH, PRESENTED BY HERMÈS IN BASELWORLD 2011, is called "Temps Suspendu" and as its French name suggests, it can help us "postpone" time! To be even more precise, one can suspend the time indication on one's own wristwatch!

ON A BEAUTIFUL, AUSTERE DIAL, using highly aesthetic Arabic numerals in italics, the hour hand is constantly indicating a bit before the 12 o'clock, while the minute hand is constantly indicating a bit after 12 o'clock. It is as if the date hand is missing. But when pushing on the button which is at 9 o'clock, the three hands show the current time as well as the date! The movement is created by Jean-Marc Wiederrecht, a very successful watchmaker who became famous for his very important Harry Winston Opus IX, his collaboration with MB&F for the creation of some "Horological Machines" and a series of other watches. Experts say that his "magic touch" can be easily recognized in the skilfully designed calibre!

THE MOVEMENT IS PLACED IN THE CASE OF ARCEAU COLLECTION BY HERMÈS, that looks as if it is "suspended" from the upper part of the leather strap. The diameter is 43 mm in 18K rose gold or 316L steel. The first one has a silver dial, while the other one silver or black. The leather strap (Hermès quality of course) comes in black or Havana brown.

ITS MOVEMENT IS A WORLD FIRST, AS THE HOUR AND MINUTE HANDS are actually of retrograde type forming a 360° cycle! Including the date hand, this particular watch is the only one in the history of watchmaking that has three retrograde hands.

BUT OF COURSE IT IS NOT THE FIRST TIME THAT HERMÈS HAS "PLAYED" WITH THE NOTION OF TIME. Some years ago the presentation of the Cape Cod models with their original dials that you can admire on the photos, made a real sensation. The model's name is Cape Cod Grandes Heures and the case is made of stainless steel, while the dials are in silver or grey anthracite.

WE CAN EASILY IDENTIFY WITHIN THE DIAL with the vertical lining, that the distances between hours are peculiar! In fact, the hour indexes are not equally positioned as it is the case in all other watches!

THUS, IN THE FIRST DIAL HOURS between 12 to 1, 5 to 6, 6 to 7 and 11 to 12 have a longer "duration"! So we might wonder how the minute hand manages to move and work correctly, when between 12 and 1 for instance, we'll need more than 60 minutes!

WELL, THE ANSWER LIES WITHIN THE OVAL WHEELS PRODUCED BY DUBOIS-DÉPRAZ, which are "responsible" for making your hours seem... uneven! The "hour" between 12 and 1 will last longer than the one between 1 and 2, which are close to one another. The minute dial in the first case (12-1) will run in a "chill out" mode while afterwards it will better speed up to regain "lost time"!

IN THAT WAY YOU CAN REST FOR A "LONG HOUR" (12-1) and be able to get dressed for a lunch during the "short" one (1-2)! That is what I call time on demand! Still, there's no reason to lose our senses: the total of the peculiar daily measurement is always 24 hours, exactly!

— LARGE PHOTO —

Hermès Arceau Temps
Suspendu at..ease.

— A + B —

The two dials of the Temps
Suspendu in action.





LET'S NOW MOVE ON TO THE NEXT WATCH, which is the first of a kind making a big noise lately. It was manufactured by the Master of Complications, Franck Muller, the man who placed on our wrists what the leading ancestors watchmakers some centuries ago put in gentlemen's pockets...

IN 2006, FRANCK MULLER PRESENTED the first watch with its hands stopped on "12" and by pushing a single button we could choose to see the exact time. This particular model was initially named "Magic Hours" and it was launched in the classic 7850 size. A couple of years later it was renamed "Secret Hours" and new models were added in bigger sizes (8850), using precious stones and bigger cases (Long Island). But of course this is not Franck's craziest idea as you may remember that some years ago he had the nerve to change the hour positioning in his model Crazy Hours!

TOGETHER WITH FRANCK MULLER another "usual suspect" participated in the creation of Magic Hours: Mathias Buttet who used to work as technical director for Franck Muller until 2004 when he founded BNB Concept. When leaving Franck Muller he left his dossier unfinished. Two years later his colleagues turned his concept into reality.

MATHIAS BUTTET is also the creator of one of the most "revolutionary" watches of our times: the notorious Day & Night by Romain Jerome, which was launched in BaselWorld 2008 as the first watch of high precision (with Sequential Double Tourbillon) with no hands!

Personally I believe this creation can be seen as the most accurate comment on the overproduction of Tourbillon models, even by companies which are not of the field. But let's leave Mathias continue narrating his story from the beginning.

MATHIAS BUTTET: The ex-CEO of Romain Jerome, Yvan Arpa (just like Jean-Claude Biver) is one of the few people who are capable of moving watchmaking madness

steps forward! We could say they both love and live passionately the right to be different in watchmaking. Many people might say they have such a talent, but essentially they are not bringing something really new.

YVAN ARPA IS A FRIEND OF MINE. We used to have lunch together and I remember that I was always late. So one day that I stood him up for 45 minutes he told me I should wear one of his creations to stop being that late! And I replied that with so many different customers, I couldn't afford to wear one of their models, as all the others would be offended. The only thing that could change my mind would be a watch indicating time for work and time for fun. We looked each other in the eye and we immediately thought a big idea was about to be born. Our lunch lasted an extra hour but in the end we had already designed a watch with two tourbillon cages,

one for the hours of work and another for the time for fun!

I have to admit, though, that during those days we worked more than 12 hours daily!

AFTER 8 MONTHS of research in BNB, the model appeared, as seen in the photo, but it was finally produced with hands as Yvan thought they would shut him in a mental institution if he were to charge more than 200,000 CHF for a watch with no hands!

WITH THIS PARTICULAR WATCH we return to the initial idea described in Key of Time: we live spending our time on things we haven't chosen to do freely and when at a certain moment we start drafting a report

of our deeds, we feel we haven't done things according to our wishes and aspirations. Creating these kind of watches and reading articles like yours, might offer many people the opportunity to think over how they can manage their time appropriately. It is crucial for the watchmaking industry not only to deal with keeping time accurately, but also to start asking questions about time itself. Even a reader who manages to rethink how he spends his time can be considered a success.



Romain Jerome Day & Night



Various models from
the Franck Muller
Secret Hours Collection.
Tonneau or rectangular
shape, with or without
precious stones



Thomas Prescher
Tempusvivendi

— A —
Samurai

— B —
American Eagle

— C —
Dragon

— D —
Crane



THE FOLLOWING WATCH COLLECTION, which offers the opportunity to see or hide time, is the only one connecting the historic past and present and it is the work of a particular and talented watchmaker, Thomas Prescher, who lives in Twan in Switzerland.

WORKING WITH HISTORIC POCKET WATCHES, he collected the appropriate knowledge to create “Bras-en-l’Air” watches that flourished during the 20’s. These peculiar models thrived for many years as wrist and pocket watches. Vacheron Constantin in collaboration with Verger Frères was a pioneer while even Gübelin, some decades ago, included such watches in its collections, for example the exquisite limited edition (7 unique pieces) depicting the Colossus of Rhodes!

THE STARTING POINT FOR THE CREATION of such watches was the discovery of the retrograde hands system; an alternative option to the classic, circular movement of hands. Furthermore, let’s not forget that the most important watchmaking techniques, as well as artful ornaments and far-fetched designs began in the early 18th century.

THE TWO HANDS SHAPED LIKE HUMAN ARMS are of retrograde type and after a half-cycle of 12 hours and 60 minutes respectively, both hands return to their initial position counting time perpetually. Prescher uses various depictions in his Tempusvivendi collection, made exclusively of 18K gold, a material used to create the 43 mm case of his watches, while the dial is made of onyx and other semi-precious stones. Pushing a single button we can activate the time indication. The hour indication is not simply retrograde but also jumping, which means that hours change through a hand “jump”.

THEMES ON DIALS vary and those that stand out are: a Samurai, a Geisha, a Dragon, a Phoenix, the American and the Russian Eagle, etc.



Three limited edition
“Bras-en-l’Air” watches

— A + C —
1930 Verger Frères

— B —
Collosus of Rhodes
by Gübelin





*Different ornaments for Reverso
(back side):*

— A —

A beloved person...

— B —

*One of the most complicated
movements ever manufactured*

— C —

Reproduction of an original painting

— D —

Emblem or logo engraving

— E —

*Enamel logo
(British Racing Drivers' Club)*



LAST BUT NOT LEAST, a great legend of watchmaking... my personal favourite, which was not created in the framework of a game on time, but can be easily and in style be part of our tribute!

OF COURSE, I'M TALKING ABOUT THE REVERSO by Jaeger-LeCoultre, which celebrates its 80th anniversary this year (2011). It was manufactured to help polo players avoid breaking the crystal of their wristwatch, but it soon became a symbol of hiding and showing time, through the two-sided case that serves two different purposes.

SOME SAY THAT this particular aspect was first introduced in Japan, where the company struggled in terms of sales. That is why people from Jaeger-LeCoultre underlined that particular aspect: either follow time accurately in the front dial or enjoy relaxed a moment of intimacy by turning the watch to the other side and looking at a beautiful picture, an engraving, or even the excellent movement and an additional indication, etc.

JAEGER-LECOULTRE, on the occasion of the 80th anniversary since the first commercial presentation of Reverso, created a virtual museum where the lovers of that particular collection can "show" their tailor-made Reverso!

AT THE END OF MY DISCUSSION with Mathias Buttet, when talking about his future plans, I mentioned I never wear a wristwatch at home so when I go out and wear my Reverso, the watch has stopped ticking. So I was saying to him that I don't wind it and consequently I wear it with the hands stopped. And then I added: "A stopped watch, shows time accurately twice a day!"

"WELL THAT'S NOT BAD AT ALL, HE RESPONDED. There are watches that when functioning cannot keep time accurately ever!"



The creativity of Antoine Prezioso remains original and unique as he manufactures watch movements, that are then added to jewellery that his daughter, Laura, designs. Instead of inserting two hands, for the hour and minute indication, he chooses to use more romantic and rare indications, such as moon phases...