

THE SHAPE OF TIME

The designers:

Alexandre Peraldi,
Design Product Director of Baume
& Mercier

Christian Knoop,
Creative Director IWC Schaffhausen

Christoph Behling,
product designer and founder of
Christoph Behling Design

Eric Giroud,
product designer and owner of Through the
Looking Glass

Fabian Schwaerzler,
product designer

Fabrizio Buonomassa Stigliani,
Director of Bulgari Watches Design Center

Matthieu Allègre,
watch designer

Sébastien Chaulmontet,
Head of Innovation and Marketing at Sellita

Xavier Perrenoud,
Professor of Design at ECAL, founder XJC

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Questions
by Roger Ruegger
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— **The often tedious process** of designing a new watch involves a lot more than the aesthetic and functional dimensions. The positioning of a product or brand, for example, its history or intended purpose, research, marketing briefings, economic specifications or restrictions, a desire to display a watch's specific mechanical feature, feedback from dreaded focus groups and, of course, sometimes also from management, will most likely have an impact on how the finished product will look. In other words, the task of designing a pilots' watch for a new brand versus redesigning a classic watch range for an established watch company is likely to be as different as going from furniture design to drawing a sketch for a concept car.

For this reason, WatchTime interviewed nine different designers in Switzerland, including independent industrial designers, freelance watch designers, lead designers of large brands and even a movement designer, about the role of design in watchmaking, where they get their ideas, and what they think good design is. Here are some of their answers. (The full interviews can be found on watchtime.com)

What is the role of a designer in the watch industry?

Fabrizio Buonomassa Stigliani: It depends. If you have a very small brand, you have to make a lot of different things. If you have a big group, a big brand like Bulgari, you have to manage the heritage of the brand. At the same time, you have to make an improvement, each time, about this heritage. So, at Bulgari, my role is to manage this impressive archive and, at the same time, imagine the scenarios for the future. So, the designer is not just someone that has to be able to make sketches on the paper, but has to be able to imagine products that don't exist yet, and has to be able to convey the values of the brand. If you are alone, a small brand without heritage, without roots, it may be that you have to invent the brand from scratch. It could be easy at the beginning, but could be, even, very, very difficult. If you have to manage the heritage of a brand like Bulgari, that was born centuries ago, in Rome, so, you have to convey all the values of the Italian design culture, and at the same time you have to make an evolution of the designs that you can find in your archives.

Eric Giroud: This role is different depending on



'The role of a designer is to help brands to stay awake and to stimulate innovation.'

Xavier Perrenoud

the watch brands. For example, with some brands, a designer is involved in the design and the future vision of the brand. Then there's the drawing, which is a tool to communicate the ideas and designs. For some brands, the work of the designer is limited to the drawing. For my part, the work of the designer is very broad. It is placed often and more and more at the stage of design and research but I am formed by my career as an architect or a project is the result of global thinking and not a pretty drawing.

Sébastien Chaulmontet: Well, like in any other field, to make beautiful products which meet (and hopefully exceed) the customers' expectations. The thing which might be slightly different in the field of mechanical watches is the highly technical and functional aspect of a watch. Therefore, good watch designers should also have a profound understanding of the functioning of a watch movement. In addition, in modern high-complicated watches, you can barely dissociate the case, dial and movement. They are very much integrated and should therefore be designed as a whole.

Christoph Behling: Understanding and capturing the amazing art of the last 100 years of watch-making, while creating new designs which are relevant today and last the next 100 years. The amazing quality of TAG Heuer or Zenith watches means that technically they will work perfectly well in 50 years – it is my job to make sure that their design will last at least that long. The designer has to balance past and future.

Christian Knoop: Mechanical watches have a rich and fascinating history and many of them become iconic products within the world of luxury accessories. Nowadays, these watches are not just instruments to read the time. They are objects that our customers connect with on a very deep and emotional level. Luxury and beauty always went together and therefore the design and the aesthetics play a very important role. In a market where new products pop up every day, our responsibility as a designer is to create products that stand out and are relevant and recognizable because they reflect the values of a brand and speak to the customer's heart.

Xavier Perrenoud: The role of a designer is to help brands to stay awake and to stimulate innovation. Of course, it has to be in coherence with the brand's roots.

How did you get into watch design?

Alexandre Peraldi: A recipe from the Zen philosophy has always followed me. It says something like this: "If you want to paint bamboo, find the most beautiful bamboo first. Sit in front of it and watch it. From all angles, on all sides, to become bamboo yourself. At that moment,



'Mechanical watches are objects that our customers connect with on a very deep and emotional level.'

Christian Knoop

forget everything ... and paint" I try to apply this precept for all design work. Be prepared in advance for all the possibilities, technical and aesthetic, all the constraints and all the objectives, in order to better free myself when I begin to work.

Christian Knoop: I am an industrial designer by training and started my career working on different products like furniture, consumer electronics, domestic appliances, industrial products and even aircraft interiors. Already, before I joined IWC, I admired the aesthetical consistency of the brand. So when I was asked to head their design department, I felt much honored. It's very satisfactory to design a product that is so deeply touching our customers. Watches are clearly the most emotional products I have ever worked with.

Fabian Schwaerzler: I started with furniture design. Over the years, I developed skills and a way of essential design thinking, which I can adapt now to all kinds of objects. Seven years ago I discovered the watch as a piece of micro architecture. The rules are the same: It is about proportions and space.

The Constant Force
Tourbillon from Arnold
& Son, developed by
Sébastien Chaulmontet



'You always have to navigate between the aesthetic and mechanical aspects of things.'

Sébastien Chaulmontet

Matthieu Allègre: I began to work in a watch design agency in Neuchâtel. It was the best experience I have ever had, meeting inspiring people and discovering the background of watchmaking. Since this experience I have fallen in love with watchmaking: one year later I decided to follow my heart (founding a design agency).

Eric Giroud: I studied music and architecture. I always wanted to become a designer one day. I worked initially on the packaging and on the design of objects such as lighting, furniture, writing instruments, or telephones. Then a project of a watch was presented to me in 1997. Since then, I focused on this topic because I have a special affinity with the object 'Watch' and the world of watchmaking.

Fabrizio Buonomassa Stigliani: You need to have a passion for watches. I am an industrial designer. I made a lot of different things during my career. I started in the automotive industry, but for a certain period, I was a consultant, an external consultant, so I made a lot of different ideas for different products. You need to have a passion for watches, because otherwise it's a very small, small world, not just in terms of dimension, because we are talking about 600 components in 45 millimeters, sometimes, for the grand complication watches. You need to be passionate about details, about beautiful things. So, that's why. I love watches, I love cars, I love all beautiful objects. I think that is very important, to be passionate about beautiful things, and to pay attention to details.

What is good (watch) design for you?

Fabian Schwaerzler: I love the original Swatch, the model GB100. It is innovative and democratic, and the design is functional and honest. That is how design should be. In the design of the dial of the LI watch there is a similar spirit of Swiss graphic functionality. Besides, there is this rare Patek Philippe Calatrava Reference 2585, which keeps on fascinating me.

Sébastien Chaulmontet: A good mechanical movement is one that is as technically flawless as it is aesthetically pleasing. In addition, a movement is only good when the available space is used in the best possible way. Like for a car engine, you want the most horsepower and lowest consumption possible. As a movement designer, you recognized pretty easily if a movement was designed as a whole or if there are afterthoughts / bad compromises because initial choices were wrong. Sometimes it is better to delete a half-perfect movement and start again than to try to fix it with bad compromises. The new 3-D software has made designing a movement too easy in a way. Movement designers often start drawing without too much thinking



Zenith's new Defy Lab,
designed by Christoph Behling



'The designer has to
balance past and future.'

Christoph Behling

and take things as they come. A good movement designer knows where he wants to go and, in the best case, he even has the movement in his mind before he starts his computer. That was the way they did things in the past, as they had to draw it all by hand.

Eric Giroud: Good design is a consistent watch with a little tension, beautifully proportioned, original visual codes and good ergonomics. The Royal Oak from Audemars Piguet model is a fine example of good design by its singularity and its very modern design. In more contemporary works, and without mentioning my work, Urwerk's model UR-103 is revolutionary. In the more classical style, I find the work of François-Paul Journe very coherent and modern.

Christian Knoop: A successful design is never random, but it can clearly be identified as belonging to a certain brand. It has to follow the tradition of the brand and has a unique character. Our clients are looking for orientation and a high recognition value. Some of our watch families, like the Portugieser or Pilot's Watches, have been speaking the same design language for more than 70 years. Of course, this language has evolved, but it still embodies the DNA of our brand. For me, this is outstanding watch design.

Xavier Perrenoud: It is the same as in cooking, everything has to be well balanced, perfectly done and served at the right moment! At the moment, I follow with attention the work of Ressenne.

Alexandre Peraldi: Raymond Loewy said, "The most beautiful line is the sales curve!" It should not be forgotten that the designer works for a brand. A magnificent creation that does not sell remains a piece of art. A good design is first and foremost one that speaks the best of the brand it is supposed to represent. Then, for me, a good design will be the one that first seduces the person who wants to offer it and will then be forgotten on the wrist ... a well designed watch must be super comfortable! In addition, each watch owner has his own idea of good design, the design that matches him. This is what I find difficult in the design of a watch. Seduce a customer without knowing exactly what he wants.

Where do you get your ideas?

Christoph Behling: My designs range from the instrumental tool watch to the scientific con-

cept, from timeless classic to the emotional. Good design listens very quietly and tenderly to what this project "wants to be" – then to be bold and focused to translate that feeling together with the engineers into a great piece. Sometimes that means to go into the archive to look at some old Heuer pieces quietly and at the same time go out into a London gallery to understand how to capture the 21st century.

Sébastien Chaulmontet: Mainly from historical pieces. Not that I ever want to copy them, but they show the way. You have to know and study them in order to push the boundaries a little bit further. A second aspect are new materials and technologies, which allow us to create things that past watchmakers could just dream of or were impossible to make. As Breguet said, "Give me the perfect oil and I will make you the perfect watch." So imagine what Breguet would have thought about an oil-free escapement, for instance.

Xavier Perrenoud: You can find inspiration everywhere! Working with my students in Ecal for the Master for luxury and craftsmanship is really important for me. The most important for a designer is to be curious and take nothing for granted.

Alexandre Peraldi: Everything can be a source of inspiration for a designer. For my part, everything I see, and everything I touch gives me ideas. If these ideas are tenuous at the beginning, with time and perseverance, they take shape little by little. This can come from fashion, architecture, but also from gastronomy ... Chefs today draw their plates sometimes with a lot of aesthetics. Finally, I look at people. Their outfit, their look, their way of moving, of walking. This sometimes gives me direction for creating new models.

Which product or watch would you like to see get a makeover?

Alexandre Peraldi: The connected watches. They are still too much in the aesthetic standards of traditional watches. Yet they could revolutionize the design of the objects we wear on the wrist.

Christian Knoop: It takes several years for the design and development team to create a new product. When we launch a new product at a fair, we are already working on something different. Design is never a linear process. In the case of the Da Vinci, for example, it took us nine years to get everything right. The secret of a suc-

cess is impossible to say, honestly. "I design not objects like this," because it's not the frame. In 1970, for example, you had to be able to understand the concept, the function, and the design of the product. It's not the same today.

erlike. A great watch is often something that is not only functional, but also beautiful. It's when an object is both functional and beautiful that it becomes a great watch. You have to be able to say, "I want to have a watch that is both functional and beautiful." It's not the same today.



'Seduce a customer without knowing exactly what he wants.'

Alexandre Peraldi

*The Maurice de
Mauriac L1
watch, designed
by Fabian
Schwaertler*



successful makeover is to have the right idea at the right time.

Matthieu Allègre: A new model from Rolex should be interesting, but I don't think they will plan on doing it. Otherwise, I will be interested to work on the new Auricoste Type 20, a French brand I discovered two years ago.

Xavier Perrenoud: I think that the industry has to make a big makeover. From the product, communication, sales, everything must change fast. Thinking more about the new generation of customers is key.

Fabrizio Buonomassa Stigliani: It's difficult to say, because the industrial design history is full of beautiful objects. I have in mind Castiglioni, Zanuso, Bruno Munari – all the greatest Italian

designers. It's impossible to say, honestly, "I would re-design an object like this." Because when you touch the icons, in 99 percent, you make mistakes. You have to be able to understand this concept. So, I cannot touch the Arco lamp from Castiglioni, because it's an icon.

Form follows function or function follows form?

Christian Knoop: I like the design credo "form follows function," like it is expressed in the instrument look of our Aquatimer divers' watches or our Pilot's Watches. Sometimes the design has to support and inspire a specific spirit, like classic motorsports or the rough nature on the Galapagos Islands; themes we use in our collection to highlight aspects of our history or activities with our brand partners. There, this pure functional approach is limited and the designers have to find different solutions to convey that message or spirit through the design of the watch.

Sébastien Chaulmontet: In a mechanical watch, neither of these two assertions can be the answer or the way to go, as a watch must be functional and beautiful in the same degree. Function and form are equally important and inseparable.

A good watch is when everything perfectly fits together. This is when an average watch becomes a good watch. You have sometimes to try hundreds of variants in order to have a movement that is as technically perfect as it is visually appealing and fits the case. Too often you realize, when looking closely at a watch, that either the aesthetic aspect or the mechanical one is a sort of compromise. Some are designers' watches (and are not technically done well) and some are watchmakers' watches (and lack of a perfect design). This is what makes watchmaking so exciting. You always have to navigate between the aesthetic and mechanical aspects of things.

Christoph Behling: It is not a linear process; both influence each other. There is no general hierarchy between emotional and rational. It depends on the product. The TAG Heuer Golf watch was created after analyzing with Tiger Woods and his team exactly what a golf player needs, and the form is purely based on function. TAG Heuer's Diamond Fiction was purely born out of an emotional wish I had to see how a diamond would look if it is used as a lens and not as a "reflector" – pure emotion.

The Octo Roma from Bulgari



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Fabrizio Buonomassa Stigliani

Alexandre Peraldi: For the watch designer, it is advisable to approach an existing caliber by its function. But it is also necessary to find ways to create objects of very small size with many aesthetic attributes and which adapt to the very particular range of the wrist. We often compare watch design with automotive design, but we often forget the difficulty of working on an object as small as a watch. It must be useful, effective, beautiful and comfortable.

Fabrizio Buonamassa Stigliani: In Italy, we have a different perception about beauty. We grow up surrounded by beauty. You see Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Caravaggio – it's a very, very long list. It's a part of our DNA. I'm an industrial designer. I know very well industrial design history. Form follows function, for us it's not enough. This is something that works very well for the German design culture. For Dieter

Rams, that's a designer that I love, that makes beautiful things for Braun. But, for us, form follows function, it's not enough. An object has to be beautiful; it has to be unique. So, when you see our Finissimo Automatic or Finissimo Minute Repeater, you see something different. You see the beauty that comes from the passion and the playfulness that we have, to play with constraints. It's not the perfect shape, we don't care about perfect shape, because the perfect shape is just cold. We need something warm, we need something that gets attention, to catch the attention of our clients.

What project are you most proud of?

Alexandre Peraldi: I am sincerely proud of all the projects I have worked on. Those who have had success and also the biggest failures. They all had a good reason to exist and all were

thought of with the same fervor, the same passion. Besides, when I see in the street, on a wrist, a watch that I have drawn, I am proud! Regardless of the model.

Christian Knoop: If I had to pick one single product, then it would be the Portugieser Yacht Club from 2010. It was one of my very first projects for IWC and an important milestone in the development of the product family at same time. In that sense, it will always be very special for me.

Sébastien Chaulmontet: The Arnold & Son Constant Force Tourbillon. The watch is, in my eyes, both a technical and aesthetic achievement. We invented a constant force mechanism, which is both pleasing (it rotates around itself in 60 seconds, like a tourbillon cage but by jumping every second) to the eye and extremely efficient. The movement is perfectly symmetrical and still uses



‘Good design is a consistent watch with a little tension, beautifully proportioned, original visual codes and good ergonomics.’

Eric Giroud

Alexander Perrenoud: For the watch designer, it is a challenge to approach an existing object by its function. But it is also necessary to be able to create objects of very small size, which are new, which are different, and which are not too similar to the existing ones. It is a challenge to watch design with a watchmaker's spirit, that we

the available space in the best possible manner. Therefore, nor the aesthetic nor the functionality of the movement had to suffer any compromise. This was not an easy feat. In addition, only selected elements are shown dial side, which gives a unique and very technical look to the movement.

Matthieu Allègre: When a project I designed comes on the market, that's real satisfaction, but I have confidentiality agreements with lots of brands so I prefer to keep it for me. But what I can tell you is that what I am currently working on, is probably the most complex and exciting project I did. I worked almost one year with a manufacturer here in Switzerland for developing our own prototypes with a 3D printing technology comes on the market. And for the moment this project has no brand, but I am sure it will make lots of noise. We plan to look for someone who could launch this project after the final prototype.

Eric Giroud: Without hesitation, I'm very happy to participate in the adventure MB&F, which in 11 years has become a research laboratory in the sense of a different point of view on watchmaking and mainly in what concerns the design and approach of a watch object. Overall, I'm lucky to have been able to participate in the development of design for many brands in very different price segments.

Xavier Perrenoud: Most of them, I tried to be involved 100-percent honestly in all projects I'm doing. In parallel, I always do a personal work and in this moment, I'm quite happy with a series of drawings I started in 2016.

Fabrizio Buonamassa Stigliani: I started my career at Bulgari in 2001, more or less, and I started to design a lot of different things. Each object is very important for a designer, because it means a specific moment of his life. Octo, for sure, is the most mature today. But often when someone asks me about "the best product," often I say "the next one." Because for me, the Octo is the past. It's something that we are continuing to work on. We continue to talk about Octo at the next Baselworld, for us, it's an impressive asset. But, I am a designer, so I'm looking for new ideas.

Matthieu Allègre

