

TIME KEEPERS

Switzerland sets the pace when it comes to watchmaking. We meet two young designers already moving ahead of the field, and visit the school that trains tomorrow's stars

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANOUSH ABRAR & AIMÉE HOVING WRITER: SIMON MILLS



XAVIER PERRENOUD ATELIER XJC

Xavier Perrenoud (above) has total aesthetic recall of his first wristwatch: an Eterna 'Kon-Tiki' sports edition, made in the 1960s to commemorate Norwegian Thor Heyerdahl's famous 1947 crossing of the Pacific Ocean. Even as a boy, Swiss-born Perrenoud had an eye for detail, picking up on the Eterna's Rolex-like, butch utility, the adventurously orange second hand, the rotating bezel and the heavy luminosity of the batons.

Years later, as one of the most respected names in contemporary watch design and founder of the design studio Atelier XJC, he would be asked by Eterna to redesign the 'Kon-Tiki' for a special anniversary edition. 'It was a real honour for me,' says Perrenoud, who began his career with a long apprenticeship at Neuchâtel studio Aellen Création-Développement. He set up the XJC outfit in 2001 and quickly established his credentials with clients such as Omega, Swarovski and Ebel. He is also professor for the masters in luxury design at ECAL.

'Craftsmanship is my main source of inspiration when I design a watch,' he says. This approach is apparent in one of Perrenoud's most celebrated creations, Corum's 'T-Bridge' watch, which featured crossbars on each side of the dial and a bridging crossbar to hold the horizontally aligned movement in place. www.xjc.ch

LEILA RUFFIEUX MONTBLANC

Accountancy's loss is watch design's gain. Leila Ruffieux (opposite) left school in Switzerland to study finance 'but it didn't feel good', she says. Deciding that she preferred drawing to adding and subtracting, a visit to the Haute École Arc of La Chaux-de-Fonds changed her life forever. 'I discovered the art of watch design and was immediately fascinated by it.' A four-year course specialising in micro, technical and watch design culminated in a prestigious job as designer for Montblanc's burgeoning watch division at Villeret.

These days, Ruffieux sits in her studio equipped with a huge wooden box of Caran d'Ache pencils, sketching pieces for the Montblanc Collection Villeret 1858, new models for the Rieussec collection, and creating unique, bespoke pieces for individual customers.

One of only a handful of female watch designers in the business, Ruffieux says she is inspired by contemporary art and music, but also by make-up and fashion. 'I often look at fashion blogs to get inspiration for new trends and colours,' she says. In terms of timepieces to come, she predicts a return to the traditional. 'When I think of the future of watch design, I think of beautiful traditional watches, rather than watches with many complications.' www.montblanc.com