

Sporty, Iconic and Back



Earlier this year, JeanRichard premiered its revival of a 1990s' classic – the Highlands. Since the Highlands' first incarnation, the company has been elevated to *manufacture* status and *QP* discovers how this has affected the watch that was originally celebrated as 'the quintessence of nature'. **Ken Kessler**

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Poignancy is not something this writer associates with watches per se. Yes, a timepiece handed down through the generations or a gift from a loved one will always possess the power to bring a lump to the throat. In this respect, I've been blessed by my father with a 1948 Longines, my father-in-law with a 1968 Omega Seamaster and my grandfather with a Waltham Riverside pocket watch, while learning that the ancestor for whom I was named was a watchmaker at the end of the 19th century. But the JeanRichard Highlands acquires poignancy for me because of the date at which it finally arrived.

On two occasions, I had the privilege of interviewing Dr Luigi Macaluso, the man who saved Girard-Perregaux and who revived the name of Daniel JeanRichard in a series of watches. Il Dottore – I was too much in awe of him to call him Gino – knew of my love for the original Highlands, which embodied everything I respect in a real world timepiece: practicality, authenticity and a sane price.

By the time I met him to discuss the Highlands, in 2006, not only was the watch out of production, the company name had changed officially to drop the 'Daniel', leaving only 'JeanRichard'. Crucially, the brand had started its climb upmarket, on its way to full *manufacture* status, so entry-level, ETA-powered treasures like the Highlands were no longer feasible. Still, he took time away from the hubbub of SIHH to tell me the story of the Highlands for QP19.

Fit for the job

In its earliest guise, the Daniel JeanRichard Highlands Automatic – to give the watch its full name – appeared in the mid-1990s as part of the earliest wave of watches to wear the JeanRichard label. Girard-Perregaux, too, was being re-established at the time, so it's safe to say that the rebirth of JeanRichard in 1992 was of secondary importance to the parent marque. The original Highlands was – unlike the new model bearing the name – utterly uncharacteristic of the brand, especially when compared to the oversized Bressels and the 'TV Screens'. Simply put, it was as basic as a watch could be, its sole concession to style being a choice of dial colours.

Dr Macaluso explained that the Highlands was not a banner-waving herald for the revived brand, but more a slightly nostalgic manifestation of his work a decade earlier, while in charge of Tradema Italia, a watch distribution company that included Girard-Perregaux. Unashamedly, he spoke of his fondness for Hamilton, which he described, with utter sincerity, as once being "the Patek-Philippe of the USA".

What would trigger the creation of the original Highlands was a chance viewing of a watch worn by a colleague in the fashion industry, who returned from a trip to the USA wearing an inexpensive, mail order Hamilton called the Khaki. This name now denotes a vast range of Hamiltons, but at the time, it was a civilian interpretation of a no-frills military watch.

A qualified architect with an unerring eye for proportion and clarity, as well as being Italian to the core, Macaluso realised that it would be a fantastic product to sell in Italy. At the time, the Italian market was spearheading the watch revival – it was the era of the rebirth of Panerai, the near-vertical ascent of the Rolex Daytona and, above all, Italian watch fanatics loved military pieces. Macaluso convinced Hamilton's management, then still based in the USA, to allow him to turn the Khaki from a base model into a cooler concept, and they wisely agreed. It remains to this day a reminder of Macaluso's vision, present in every Hamilton Khaki you see.

By 1992, Macaluso owned Girard-Perregaux, and with G-P came Daniel JeanRichard. With the patience of Chairman Mao, Macaluso envisioned a process, however long it might take, to elevate the brand. From the truncating of the name to simply 'JeanRichard' to its now-realised manufacture status, it was inevitable that the Highlands would have to go. If it was to be revived, it would be as an entirely different proposition.

Keeping it simple

Before Macaluso initiated JeanRichard's progress toward haute horlogerie standing, the brand had no specific image to which to adhere. This relative anonymity meant that there was nothing to prevent him from producing what he described as: "A simple but sophisticated model. I chose the name 'Highlands' because it had a Scottish, out-of-doors feel, sporty, rugged."

2011's Highlands is available in three colourways – Sands with ecru dial, directly inspired by the original, Baobab with khaki dial and Ebony with black dial. The hours are marked by large Arabic numerals and a luminescent coating on the hands leads to maximum readability – in even the murkiest conditions.





The Highlands creator Gino Macaluso (far right) with his sons Stefano and Massimo who today continue the many projects their father initiated.

It was offered only in stainless steel with either a bracelet, not unlike a Rolex's, or a leather or canvas strap. The fashion market was addressed by a choice of dial colours. Italians, already seduced by the variety offered by Swatch and – crucially – the earlier MHRs of Dominique Pibouleau, were treated to dials of black, cream, navy blue, light blue, olive green and salmon pink, fitted with straps in complementary hues. The choice of colours created an entire family.

Like Hamilton's Khaki, the Highlands featured an upward-pointing triangle at the 12 o'clock position in true military fashion. It carried three hands from the centre, with the seconds-hand a true hacking type that stopped when the crown was in the 'out' position, along with rapid date setting, the date visible through a window at the 3 o'clock position. Arabic numerals completed the look.

Inside was a DJR Calibre 25 movement with a power reserve of 38 hours, based on ETA's 2824 calibre, in a deliciously solid stainless steel case measuring 38mm across, with screw-down crown for water-resistance to 50m. It was, for all intents and purposes, a replica of an IWC Mk 11 in everything but the name, at a tenth of the price. And that was the kicker, something in the region of £250.

Dottore Macaluso never revealed the sales figures, considering that the watch was only on sale in any serious fashion in Italy, but he did admit that it "sold many thousands".

New blood

And many thousands is what you will pay for its progeny – £3,700 to be precise. While I had expected a new Highlands to be nothing more than an original scaled up by 2-3mm, and fitted with an in-house movement, JeanRichard married the concept of an earthy watch to another JeanRichard specialty: it features the Aquascope case, itself a re-imagining of the case for the JeanRichard Aquastar of the 1960s.

Measuring 44.5x40mm, made of sand-blasted steel, with a rotating bezel marked in 12-hour increments, it can be used to show a second time zone without being an actual GMT. It is water-resistant to 100m, thanks to a proper screw-down crown, protected by shoulders and contains the JR1000 in-house automatic movement with 48-hour power reserve, with date at the 3 o'clock position.

Where the new Highlands demonstrates a nod to the past is through the use of a military-style dial – although on the latest version the Arabic numerals are much larger. The hands, too, are oversized and on this version are more vividly luminescent, to offer what the

company describes as, "excellent readability in even the murkiest conditions". Another acknowledgement of the original is through the choice of colours offered, although not, it has to be stressed, to the extent of sky blue and salmon pink.

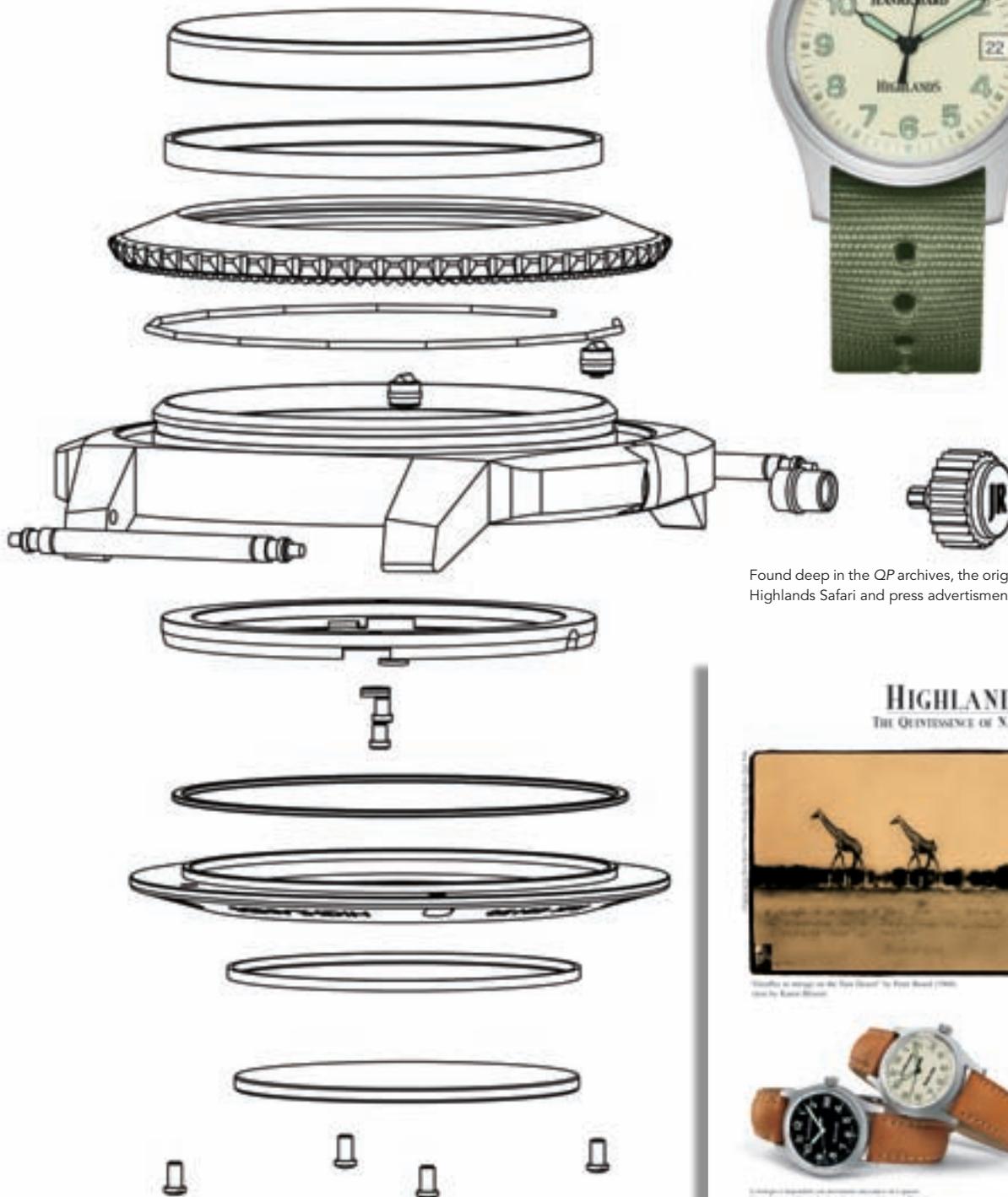
Likely to be the most popular of the three versions is the icon-in-the-making Highlands Sand, with ecru dial and two straps, one in khaki fabric one in brown calfskin, with sand-blasted stainless steel folding buckle. Also available is the Highlands Baobab with a khaki dial and the Highlands Ebony with black dial, both with complementary straps.

Back in 2006, when asked if JeanRichard might one day consider releasing a Highlands II, with in-house movement and commensurately elevated price, Dottore Macaluso made it clear that he had not even considered it. After all, by that point JeanRichard was primed for a more prestigious market position. What was important is that he smiled when I asked him – and didn't say no.

As for the poignancy, it breaks my heart that Luigi Macaluso passed away in October 2010. But I like to think, given the gestation period of any new watch, that the all-new Highlands has his handiwork all over it.

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One of the most significant developments from the original Highlands is in the design of the robust 44.5x40mm case, which reprises a theme close to the brand's heart: the use of a round bezel on a tonneau base. The piece is powered by the in-house JR1000 automatic movement.



Found deep in the QP archives, the original 1990s Highlands Safari and press advertisement.

