



Turning It Around



Watch enthusiasts love a heart-warming tale of salvation. The rescues from obscurity of Panerai, Jean Richard, Breguet, Blancpain and so many others have resulted in an era where the world of watches is so vibrant and varied that we're spoiled for choice. Amongst those who participated in the post-quartz renaissance, along with a host of other brave auteur watchmakers was Roger Dubuis.

Georges Kern is currently CEO of Roger Dubuis - as well as IWC - and is spearheading the much-anticipated UK relaunch.

Ken Kessler



The La Monégasque collection, based on the thrill of the casino, comes in four variations: the La Monégasque automatic, chronograph, perpetual calendar and tourbillon. The new collection incorporates exceptional mechanical movements that have been designed, developed and produced by *manufacture* Roger Dubuis. Each meets the high standard of aesthetic required by the Poinçon de Genève.

For a few years now, Roger Dubuis has been conspicuous in its absence and virtual silence. The unchecked, ill-informed brutes of the internet spluttered and ranted that this once-great house was acquired by the Richemont Group solely for its state-of-the-art *manufacture*, which the luxury group that owns Cartier, Piaget, IWC and so many others might exploit for the factory's capacity for creating astonishing complications. Dubuis would be forgotten.

How wrong they were, for Roger Dubuis is back as a full-blown watch brand, completely cognizant of its history. The recent near-silence? Merely a by-product of feverish, behind-the-scenes revival.

Roger Dubuis was founded by Carlos Dias and Roger Dubuis as a manufacturer of fine watches and associated jewellery. Watchmaker Dubuis opened his own atelier in 1980 after 14 years developing complications for Patek Philippe. As with many other maestri of his generation, which encompassed the decline and revival of mechanical watches, he undertook commissions to design new complications for major brands.

Carlos Dias, a designer for Franck Muller, joined Dubuis to launch the brand in 1994,

showing its first watches in 1996. Geneva-born Roger Dubuis submitted his watches to the body that awards the quality hallmark of the Poinçon de Genève, as well as receiving chronometer certifications. In an embarrassingly short time, the company created dozens of fresh, unique, limited-production movements, from chronographs to perpetual calendars to tourbillons. Art deco styling, a variety of cases, hand-painted enamel dials: the house offered a pot pourri of *haute horlogerie* delicacies.

In an equally compressed time period, Roger Dubuis' retirement was followed by difficulties with distribution in two important markets, the USA and the UK. In August 2008, the Richemont Group acquired a 60 per cent interest in Roger Dubuis SA, acquiring the remainder within two years, to create a wholly owned subsidiary capable of producing the sort of complicated movements that would soon power Cartier's most adventurous models. But whither Dubuis?

An old friend returns

QP met with Georges Kern, the new CEO of Roger Dubuis as well as IWC, to discuss the challenge of re-establishing the Roger Dubuis brand. Kern sees it as a three-fold task, starting with a Dubuis tradition they intend not only to maintain but to

highlight as a feature of every watch the company will produce. "The first element is explaining to the consumer the honour of earning the Geneva seal, Poinçon de Genève, on every Roger Dubuis movement. It is not only unique to Roger Dubuis, but helps to explain the value of our *manufacture* movements.

"The second is to come up with a design that corresponds with the intrinsic character of the Roger Dubuis brand. It has to be something that does not overrule the horological content of the watch - its shape and execution. The third is to create the dream and emotion in our communication, something that is truly unique and relevant for our clients. All of these elements must correspond to the 'extraordinary world of Roger Dubuis'."

Having overseen spectacular growth in the perception of and sales by IWC, Kern has already breathed new life into a brand in need of revitalisation. His contribution to the programme involves long term plans that will unfold over the next four or five years, starting in January 2011. He sees his role as much a part of management as of specific, product-related input.

"As a leader, you have to bring in your vision for a brand, and very often this

After the huge success of the Excalibur, Roger Dubuis is addressing the market for serious timepieces for women by launching the Excalibur Lady.

As a leader, you have to bring in your vision for a brand, you have to build a solid team and work together on a strong implementation plan, you need conviction towards all parties involved that the new path is the right one to follow



means introducing and executing concrete ideas. You have to build a solid team and work together on a strong implementation plan. Finally, you have to bring in judgment on what eventually fits and what doesn't. In this particular case, you need conviction towards all parties involved that the new path is the right one to follow."

Voice of experience

Kern's experience with IWC is but a part of the armoury on which the brand will depend. "My professional career started as brand manager for coffee and chocolates at Kraft Food. I entered the watch industry working for TAG Heuer and then joined the Richemont Group and became CEO of IWC in 2002. Every single one of these experiences was helpful and I learned a lot from each of them.

"There are management principles you have to follow in working in any job, industry or brand. Like any good actor who is successful in many different roles from drama to action,

a good manager should be able to run totally contrasting brands. Otherwise, he is not really so good. But whilst following best practice management principles, you need above all to have an intellectual flexibility in order to adapt to each brand's DNA and the necessary creativity to bring forward unique ideas for each individual brand."

Kern illustrated the depth of Richemont's commitment to a gathering in Geneva of distributors and retailers, hand-selected from the existing network, but reduced in numbers to ensure exclusivity. He presented to them the aforementioned game plan, which sees most importantly the rationalising of the brand.

Gone are half the ranges and many of the movements. For the future, there will be four distinct ranges, to be rolled out over the next four or five years, with the reduced number of movements grouped into families, including a brand new, completely

in-house base movement for their entry-level models.

Which led Kern to drop the bombshell: not only did Richemont spend the past two years improving the fit, finish and reliability of every movement, while refining the cases and dials, the company also reduced prices substantially. Dubuis prices are tentatively pegged to start at SFr.12,000 - with *manufacture* movement and Poinçon de Genève certification. The ranges heralding the launch will include La Monégasque, featuring a chronograph, a tourbillon, a perpetual calendar and an automatic, and Excalibur for women.

And what of the future? Alas, an embargo is in place, but there will be a rugged, macho watch, the periodic introduction of special *haute horlogerie* spectaculars and refinements of old favourites. As for the Dubuis watches of the past? Expect their values to climb in the auction houses... ☺

Further information: www.rogerdubuis.com