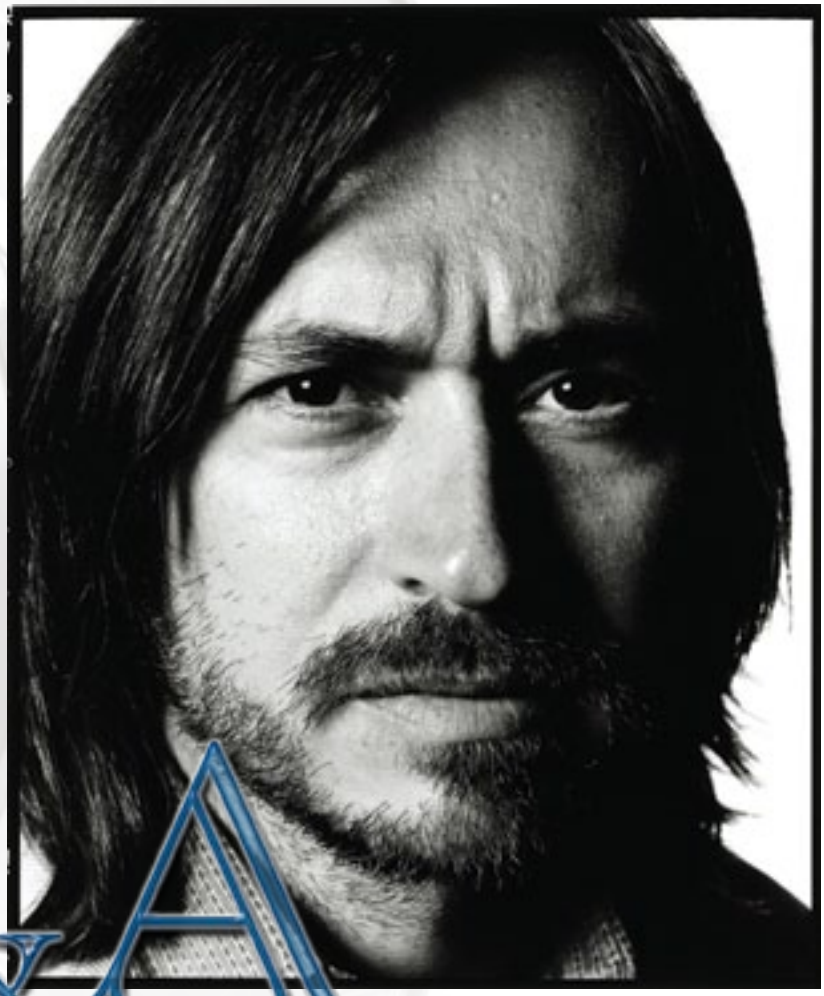


Atmos 561 and 566 designer Marc Newson.

Q&A

One of *Time Magazine*'s 100 most influential people, 46-year-old Australian Marc Newson is one of the world's most prolific designers, having worked on projects from chairs, household objects, a bicycle and a concept car to restaurants, a recording studio and interiors of private and commercial jets. In 2008 Jaeger-LeCoultre introduced the Atmos 561 clock designed by Newson and this year saw its re-invention in the shape of the Atmos 566.

You are known for many things in the design world, but not particularly your work with timekeepers. How did your relationship with Jaeger-LeCoultre come about?

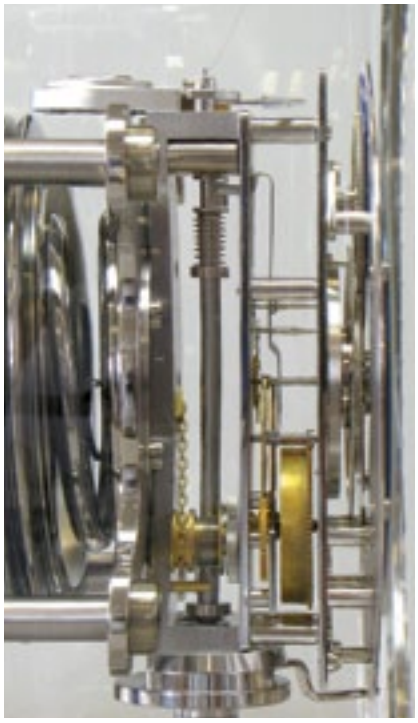
I have always been interested in clocks and watches – one of my first ventures into timekeeping was the Pod mystery dial watch in 1986 and a few years later, the Pod Clock. In 1993 I launched Ikepod with Oliver Ike and re-launched the brand in 2005 with the backing of New York-based art collector and timepiece aficionado Adam Lindemann. Through other projects I had crossed paths with Jaeger-LeCoultre several times in the past. Then, in the spring of 2007, I met with Janek [Deleskiewicz, creative director of Jaeger-LeCoultre] in Paris and, after a short conversation, we realised how complementary our thought processes were – it really did seem that together we could be the perfect combination.

I was particularly keen to work with Jaeger due to our similar work ethic. I have never seen or heard of any level of incompetence at Jaeger-LeCoultre and I have always been able to work

The stunning Atmos 566 available in a limited edition of 28 cobalt blue (£78,500).

without worrying whether things will be done properly because I know that they will be. I don't need to constantly check over shoulders, I can just get on with designing beautiful objects. It really is a dream project for someone like me. I feel really close to watch design primarily because I love working with craftsmen that possess this level of expertise. It is a very rare thing these days and a wonderful opportunity to be thrust into an environment like that.

The hidden secrets of the Atmos 566.



The Atmos is a pretty old concept; can you tell us a small bit about its history?

The mission of the Atmos is to achieve perpetual motion, which has been one of mankind's fascinations since De Vinci – and even before. The Jaeger-LeCoultre interest started with the clocks of Jean-Leon Reutterf and their mercury-operated winding mechanisms in the 1920s. Jacques David Le Coultre saw the Reutter clocks in Paris and realised that here was a new and exciting product that could rescue his company from the poor sales that followed the 1929 stock market crash. He transferred production to Le Sentier and the first Le Coultre Atmos clocks, appeared in 1936.

So, the aim is to create a clock that does not need to be wound from its outside. It gets the energy it needs to run from temperature and atmospheric pressure changes in the environment. Its power source is an internal hermetically sealed capsule containing a mixture of gas and liquid ethyl chloride, which expands into an expansion chamber as the temperature rises, compressing a spiral spring; with a fall in temperature the gas condenses and the spring slackens. This motion constantly winds the mainspring. A temperature variation of only one degree is sufficient for two days' operation.

What was it about the Atmos in particular that attracted your attention?

I bought my first Atmos 12 years ago. It is a very traditional piece and I have long seen an opportunity to bring the design forward. The Atmos is the closest thing we can get to perpetual motion – a timepiece that will go on working forever unless it is placed in an environment that has absolutely no change in temperature and that is extremely rare. It is the most ecological project I have ever worked on. It is powered by the weather, no intervention is needed and, unlike almost everything we buy today, it will never become landfill. Although the technology is over 85-years-old, it is more relevant now than at any time before. Buy this piece, treat it well and it will last forever.

The successful forerunner to the 566, the Marc Newson-designed Atmos 561.

You created the Atmos 561 in 2008. What made you get involved again with the 566?

The 561 was hugely successful so Jaeger and I decided to collaborate on another clock – the 566 Equation of Time. The clock was based on a brand new movement and when I first saw it I was mesmerised. Although there are superficial similarities, the 566 is much more complicated and, as you would expect, much more expensive. Because of the equation of time complication we had a chance to expand the design to include a view of the night sky as viewed from the Northern Hemisphere plus an indication of the cardinal points and astrological signs.

Did you encounter any problems with the manufacture of the piece?

The main problem with both the 561 and 566 was manufacturing the glass. Previously the glass housing for the Atmos had been made in different pieces but for the 561 and 566 it was an important part of the design that the case be monobloc glass blown into a square. There are very few people in the world that can do this and in the end we went to the French company Baccarat. Although Baccarat is not renowned for glass blowing, it transpired that it was the only company that could blow the shape that we wanted.

So you were happy with the relationship with Baccarat?

Absolutely. In fact, the talks with and visits to the factory are what first created the idea of enhancing the 566 with colour [there are two versions of the clock, 48 pieces in clear crystal and 28 pieces in blue]. One of the skills at Baccarat is the ability to mix unique crystal colours and the cobalt pigment used to create the blue of the 566 is unique to the company. Once we'd decided to use a colour, blue was the obvious choice as it references the sky and planetary movement is, of course, what the equation of time complication is all about. As the Atmos cases are all handmade, there is always a slight variation in shape and colour – they are not simply popped out of a mould and the rejection rate is high.

The case and movement sound as though they are extremely fragile?

Granted, the 566 looks as though it is very fragile but it is in fact quite robust. It's biggest enemy – as with all other Atmos designs – is dust. The Atmos really needs very little special treatment, although it does rely on stability to work and every one is balanced on three points like a tripod. This was disguised by the mono stand of the 561 but in the 566 there are three visible 'feet' with a spirit level in the top of the case. The three feet labour the issue of stability and turn it into a visible design element rather than disguising it.

The clear version of the Atmos 566 is available in an edition of 48, costing £67,900.

What do you think is the enduring appeal of the Atmos?

Despite being 85-years-old, the concept is, in many ways, more contemporary now than ever. 'Green' has been a buzzword for many years and there really couldn't be anything greener. Today we are saturated with digital information and the Atmos is a hugely reassuring object and possesses so many qualities that people are looking for – a mechanical, handmade object that stands out in a world of high tech.

Do you see your collaboration with Jaeger-LeCoultre and the Atmos continuing?

I would love to carry on working in the world of the Atmos. The 566 was not planned at the time of the 561 – the idea just evolved naturally from the creation of its predecessor. I think it came to a surprise to everyone involved that it could be re-invented to this degree. Reaction so far has been good and if the 566 proves to be as successful as its older brother, then there is certainly scope for further evolution.

Further information: www.marc-newson.com www.jaeger-lecoultre.com