



**PALACE**

# Palace of Allusions



Bombarded as we are with a plethora of new watches every year, it's easy to forget that each model has a story behind its development - be it intellectual, spiritual, artistic or merely commercial. Jean Dunand's Palace has a more intriguing background story than most, because the house has chosen to embody, in a single watch, its entire ethos.

## Ken Kessler

Those of you familiar with the existing Orbital Tourbillon and Shabaka might be shaking your heads as you look upon the images presented here. Neither the ever-encircling tourbillon nor the cylindrical complications of either of those watches are represented here, nor are their case shapes. Unlike the Orbital Tourbillons, each of which has a different dial made of precious and rare materials or designs, the Palace is a skeleton. And in direct contrast to the decorative geometry of the Shabaka's look, the Palace is deliberately industrial. It almost begs to be worn with an iPod full of Cabaret Voltaire or Kraftwerk.

But that would be to miss the forest for the trees. The Palace embraces hard-edged industrialism, it's true, but the inspirations encompass an era, and any soundtrack would also feature Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelly, Louis Armstrong or Scott Joplin. Along the way, you'd nod to Jean Gabin, Charlie Chaplin, Harry Houdini, Toulouse-Lautrec.



Technical drawings showing the beginnings of the Palace.

### Industrial art

According to one half of the Jean Dunand leadership, Thierry Oulevay, the primary inspiration of the Palace is the cultural and societal transformation of Western civilisation during a 50-year period defined roughly as 1880-1930. It is, however, flexible enough at both ends to welcome Crystal Palace, built for the Great Exhibition of 1851, and which gave the watch its name, as well as the fabulous cars produced in France in the decade before the Second World War: Delage, Buccioli, Bugatti, Delahaye. If one were to draw a Venn diagram, at the very nexus would be the Eiffel Tower. And corresponding almost exactly with the period would be the lifespan of the art deco master who gave the brand its name.

A bouillabaisse of inspiration then, but, so far we have merely cited the ingredients for the base consommé. Throw in the works of Jules Verne and HG Wells to address the godfathers of steampunk, add in a hefty measure of Thomas Edison and the dawn of electricity, massive steam-powered trains that broke speed records with almost tedious regularity, dirigibles, Marconi's early radio, Prohibition, talking motion pictures, and you're almost there. To seal the package, add the most relevant points of all: the birth and popularisation of the wristwatch, whether

you favour Girard-Perregaux's 1880 creation for the German Navy, Cartier's Santos launched right after the transition into the 20th century, or the effect that the First World War had on the move from pocket to wrist.

Most brands would simply address an historical period with aesthetic touches. You can do a lot with an evocative font: simply using that which still identifies the Metro stations in Paris will imbue anything from a pastry to a paperback book with a whiff of pastis and Gauloise. But Jean Dunand, however tightly woven its designs are with the visual impact of the company's namesake, is co-captained by Christophe Claret. For him to be associated with anything so mundane as a tarted-up case and movement, let alone one free of radical complications, would be unimaginable.

### The Claret way

Claret, quite independent of the need to introduce new watches, had in his armoury a new movement created in-house through an annual competition he organises to inspire his watchmakers. Upon showing the 2007 winner to Oulevay, the concept for the Palace was hatched. The basic ingredients were there. What transformed them into an *hommage*



Celebrating the achievements of every engineer from the Industrial Revolution on, Jean Dunand's Palace - named after the 1851 Great Exhibition's Crystal Palace - is reminiscent of the world's greatest iron structures from the deco design of the Chrysler building to the iconic Eiffel Tower. The in-style skeleton design of the piece allows the beating heart - an all-new, Christophe Claret-designed one-minute tourbillon - to be observed.

to one of the most fertile periods in the history of man's inventiveness was a desire to present the movement in a manner that would showcase the all-new calibre in all its glory.

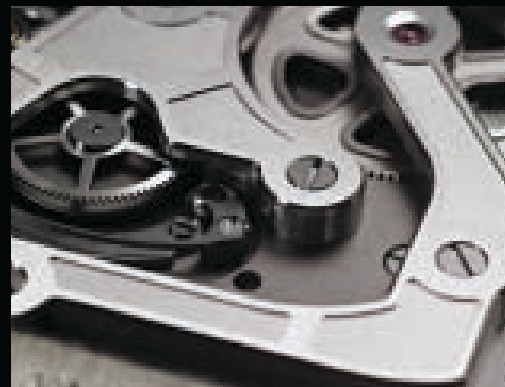
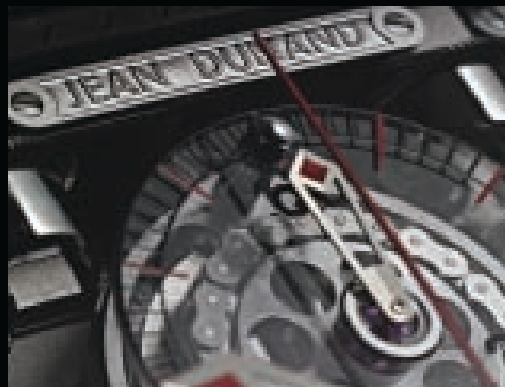
It almost goes without saying that the heart of the Palace is a one-minute tourbillon, placed at the 6 o'clock position, the balance operating at a frequency of 3Hz. Above it are skeletal hour and minute hands, below a sapphire crystal 60-minute counter for the chronograph. Yes, this is a manual-wind chronograph tourbillon. But look to either side of the tourbillon: flanking it are two vertical tracks, the one in the right-hand corner charting its 72-hour power reserve. And in the other corner? A cleverly devised linear GMT dial.

With 12 hours on either side of the lozenge-shaped trace, the indicator arrow, mounted in a disc identical to that of the power reserve's, has to make two passes. When the arrow disc reaches the end, it flies back to the top and the arrow flips to address the other scale. One suspects that the GMT advance button, positioned between the lugs at 6 o'clock, will enjoy a fair share of use during the early days of ownership, simply so one can enjoy repeatedly the little dance the arrow makes in its travels.

There's more. The winder communicates its power to the movement via an exquisitely-fashioned, microscopically tiny chain, designed, according to Ulevay, to recall the chain drive of push-bikes,



Two of Jean Dunand's influences. Above: the Eiffel Tower during construction. Image courtesy of Collection tour Eiffel. Top: Crystal Palace, home to the 1851 Great Exhibition.



So complex and detail-rich is the Palace that each will be supplied with a loupe, for studying it over the years will be part of the pleasure of ownership

and nothing to do with fuseses. It even has a minute tensioner, just like a bicycle's. The watch's plates are separated by tiny, sculpted pillars. The case sides contain arched glass windows. The metal work recalls huge iron castings, as used in the great bridges of the era, as well as the struts that compose the Eiffel Tower, Paris's most famous structure also providing the watch's side view: it looks exactly like the monument's base.

So complex and detail-rich is the Palace that each will be supplied with a loupe, for studying it over the years will be part of the pleasure of ownership. You will find something new to admire every time you study it. And the real estate is commensurately

cavernous: the movement is larger than most watches, occupying a space of 38x36.4mm. The case itself? A massive 48.2mm wide, 49.9mm long and 16.65mm thick, including the crystal. An impressive size for an equally impressive piece.

If you ever adored New York's Chrysler Building, Chaplin's *Modern Times*, Captain Nemo, 1930s streamlining from planes to trains, Phileas Fogg travelling by hot air balloon, *Doc Savage* or *The Shadow* or vaudeville or *Flash Gordon* or silent movies, the Jean Dunand Palace will put a lump in your throat. If ever something deserved a new classification, it's this watch. The classification? Cutting-edge nostalgia. ☺