

# Heritage Gallery



Spoiled for choice: that's what we are. In the past few years, an increasing number of great watch houses have presented their collections and archives to the public, from Patek Philippe to Chopard to Longines to Girard-Perregaux. What's common to all is that they are *manufactures*, with much to crow about. At last, now one of the very greatest, and possibly the most prolific, has added what they call their 'Heritage Gallery' to their factory in the Vallée de Joux.

Ken Kessler



'Very greatest?' 'Most prolific?' If you hadn't guessed immediately that those adjectives were being applied most deservedly to Jaeger-LeCoultre, you're excused for the oversight. For whatever historical or commercial reasons, the great houses have fallen into two categories: those who seem omnipresent, and those who seem almost wilfully to hide their lights under the proverbial bushel. Traditionally, Jaeger-LeCoultre (along with, it must be acknowledged, Girard-Perregaux and Vacheron-Constantin) has been exceedingly lax in boasting of the company's achievements. The Heritage Gallery will put an end to that nonsense: this is a brand to rank at the very pinnacle of horological excellence.

The ribbon cutting ceremony at the inauguration of the Jaeger-LeCoultre Museum was presided over by the brand's CEO, Jerome Lambert with honoured guest, French actress, Carole Bouquet.

To say that I was  
dazzled by the  
Heritage Gallery  
is understatement.



Tray of 19th Century Jaeger-LeCoultre blanks from 1860 to 1900.



Upon entering this beautifully designed showcase, you sense that you're about to be exposed to riches on a level that no other house can muster. Since its inception in 1833, when Antoine LeCoultre opened his first atelier, Jaeger-LeCoultre has produced over 1,000 different calibres. To the best of my knowledge, their only rival for sheer prolificacy is Longines. A thousand! And for those, over 300 patents had been filed.

### The real deal

At a time when the entire watch industry is bitching about the availability of movements, in an era when computers and CNC machines streamline the process in a way LeCoultre and Breguet and Perrelet could not have even *dreamed* about, new movements should be two a penny. But they're not, so it is sobering to see what was achieved more than a century ago ... without electricity, without lasers, without vapour depositing or ceramics or plastics.

One startling little detail should make every watch company CEO hide his or her head in shame: between 1860 and 1900, Jaeger-LeCoultre introduced 350 different calibres. That's nearly nine a year. So when some watch company boasts about one every two or three years, a yawn is in order.

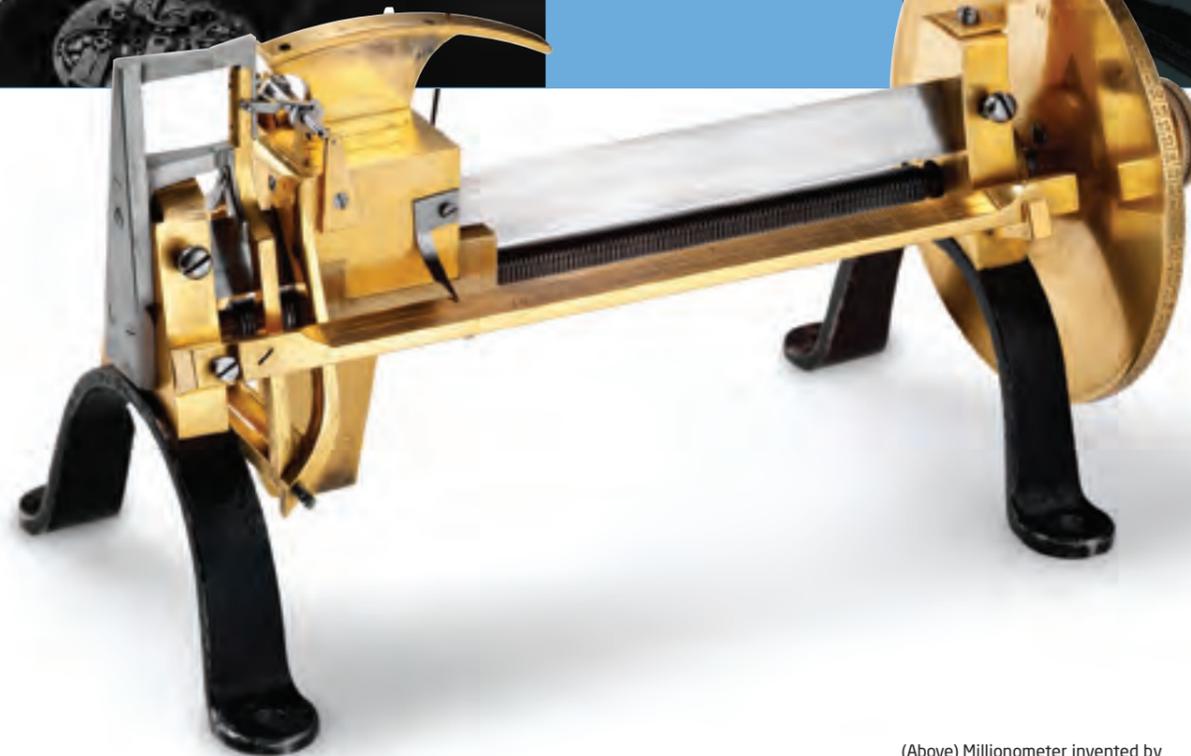
Think about it: Half of those 19th Century Jaeger-LeCoultres were complications, not mere time-only movements. The company could boast the introduction of 99 repeaters, of which two-thirds were minute repeaters, 128 different chronographs, and 33 movements that featured both repeater and chronograph functions.

### La Grande Maison

Jaeger-LeCoultre's Heritage Gallery, in the building affectionately known to locals as 'la Grande Maison' showcases both complete

timepieces – pocket watches, wristwatches and clocks – and uncased movements. And there are enough of the latter for them to fill a curved glass showcase that connects two floors. If you're a watch addict, there is nothing so humbling as viewing what is in effect a curtain made up entirely of perfectly restored movements.

Separated into distinct areas, the largest section of the Heritage Gallery houses the company's permanent collection of watches, clocks and movements, all designed and produced within the *Manufacture*. (For any of you taking a holiday in Switzerland with plans to visit watch museums, note that some, such as Patek Philippe's, also present historic timepieces from other sources.)



(Above) Millionometer invented by Antoine LeCoultre was the first instrument enabling measurement of a unit corresponding to one millionth of a metre, referred to as a micron.

(Top left) Joaillerie 101, 1938 has the world's smallest mechanical movement. The case is 18ct. white gold with 63 baguette-cut diamonds.

(Top centre) Reverso watch LeCoultre Calibre 403, 18ct. pink gold with enameled with Indian Lady, 1936.

(Top right) Atmos Regulateur Phases de lune has hours and minutes on separate dials, months and perpetual moon phase indications with a 24 hour disc.

The company's description of the goal of the design was to create a setting where, 'Past and future subtly merge. The area is graced with displays that combine to form a coherent whole, much like a watch movement.'

Its two levels – one floor and a mezzanine – are said to provide 'a nod to the famous split-level 1925 Duoplan calibre.' Within, six 4 m tall showcases support and surround the mezzanine; continuing the design analogy with that of a watch, the structure 'acts much like a movement bridge.'

### Time for art

Complementing a fabulous selection of key models from the company's history is a section of the Gallery dedicated to temporary exhibitions that will alternate three times a year between watchmaking themes and artistic photography. The latter is a field that Jaeger-LeCoultre supports through regular partnerships.

Constructed of glass, wood, metal and stone, the Gallery is airy and perfectly illuminated, an ideal showplace for small and intricate subjects. The displays are grouped

chronologically and themed, for example, you can find the diving watches in one area, calendars in a group, military watches in yet another. But then there's the wall...

### The wall

Standing 4.7 m tall, the 5.4 m curved glass 'sandwich' contains more 300 different watch movements, suspended on wires and labelled with the calibre number. And you *will* strain your eyes to study that miracle of miniaturisation: the Calibre 101. If you're a royalist, you'll find it hard to avoid a lump in the throat when you see it: Queen Elizabeth is said to be partial to hers.

Do give the company plenty of notice of your visit; if the timing is right, you might be allowed on a tour of the *manufacture*. To say that I was dazzled by the Heritage Gallery is understatement. But I did leave wondering about one thing: whatever happened to the four Reversos with miniatures of Tamara De Lempicka paintings on their backs? I looked for them in vain, but was soon distracted by myriad Atmoses, assorted rare Memovoxes like the Polaris and the Deep Sea, Futurematics, the super-rare Jaeger-LeCoultre Mk 11.... ☹