

Watchismo's TIMEWARP



Mitch Greenblatt



#5. Vintage Watching: Maximilian Büsser

After many opportunities to address my proclivities here at the *Timewarp*, I wanted to turn the loupe on people who have never failed to impress me, to explore what makes *them* tick. First on my list was modern pioneer, Maximilian Büsser.

▲ **Pioneer**
Maximilian Büsser.
▶ **St Imier**
Saint-Martin de la Reine Berthe belfry.



Unless you've been living under a rock of Quartz, I need not tell you that Maximilian Büsser, his Friends and their Horological Machines are a renegade force of watchmakers who blend their talents towards radical new timepieces; an entirely new creation with each revolution of their clan.



I asked Max if he'd share a few highlights from his personal collection. After some thought, he remembered a few antique pocket watches he bought some four years ago. These purchases were inspired during a meeting with his friend, collaborator and fellow horological pioneer, Francois-Paul Journe. Journe had showed Max his rare collection of 19th century laminated iron, gunmetal and steel pocket watches, which for the most part were unsigned. Many of these have since been immortalized in the book, *Steel Time*.

To begin to appreciate the distinction of these specimens, let's flip back a few pages in history... The Industrial Revolution is busy reorganising the world at large; steel soon becomes the affordable, unpretentious and the greatly improved medium of mass



▲ **St Imier**
Saint-Imier 1100 year anniversary pocket watch based on Saint-Martin de la Reine Berthe belfry.

production. In watchmaking, this drove experimentation with form and function, jumpstarting a period of innovation. At long last, punctuality was no longer an upper class privilege and watches were making their way into the pockets of a broader audience.

Until recently, these watches were almost entirely overlooked by collectors, not fully appreciated for their role in the evolving history of horology and even their relevance in today's powerfully spirited independent watch market.

In the good old days of eBay - before the 'vintage vultures' took over - Max was staying up at nights, searching for his own collection of steel pocket watches. His hunt yielded the rare specimens pictured here.

Continued overleaf.

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Blackened steel with full calendar on back ▶

"I always smile when brands try to market 'Big Date' watches as being a super-complicated and rare achievement", Max says regarding this gunmetal model with a full calendar on the back. "Also I love pieces which have complications on the back - like what we did at Harry Winston with Opus 2 and 5 and what Felix does with Urwerk."



▼ Plated steel green jumping hour

"I was attracted to this piece for many reasons: first the jumping hour and minute disk, second the amazing green (enamel?) dial, and lastly because of the engraving on the back - Manufacture d'armes et cycles France - I never knew if they made the watch (which would be really amazing) or if it was the name of a company that was giving the piece as a gift."



▲ Blackened steel 7 day power reserve

"This piece is full of surprises: at first glance it looks like a creative square simple pocket watch, but when you click the back open: a 7 day Hebdomas barrel system (not that rare), with something I had never seen before: a concentric 7 day engraved disk which indicates the power reserve."



▼ Saint-Imiers 1100 year anniversary pocket watch

Max then showed me his Saint-Imier 1100 years anniversary pocket watch. This commemorative watch was the collective effort of several parties. It was ordered by the organising committee and town counsel in 1984 to celebrate the belfry and one-hand clock of the tower "Saint-Martin de la Reine Berthe," produced by a variety of local watchmakers and craftsmen, and assembled by the locally based Swiss brand, Longines.

The one-handed watch, which is made of nickel-silver and engraved with an image of Prudence, "the mother of all virtues", was part of a limited edition series and is backed up with documentation crediting each person involved with its creation. Ever a collaborative spirit himself, Max perceived an affinity between this project's ancestries and his own MB&F concept. ○