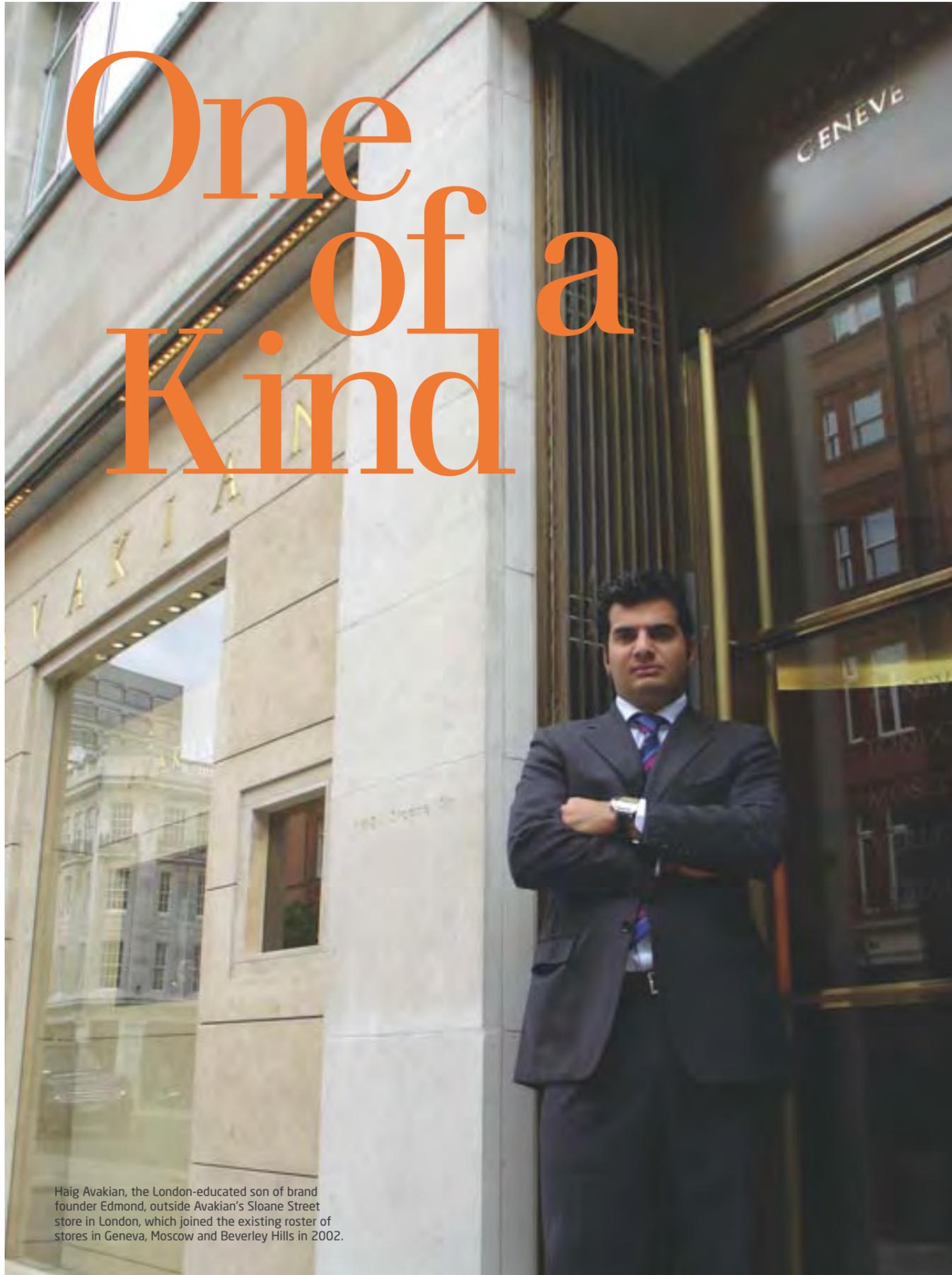


One of a Kind



Haig Avakian, the London-educated son of brand founder Edmond, outside Avakian's Sloane Street store in London, which joined the existing roster of stores in Geneva, Moscow and Beverley Hills in 2002.

Nowhere else in London will you find a selection of watch brands as unique as Avakian's

James Gurney

Marcus, Watches of Switzerland, Wempe and boutiques dedicated to single brands such as Breguet, Jaeger-LeCoultre, Patek Philippe and Rolex mean that Bond Street is still 'watch central' for London, offering a depth and range that is world-class. Away from the shadow of Bond Street, and just a couple of stops away on the Piccadilly line, Knightsbridge has become a viable rival. Between the "Luxury Watch Room" at Harrods and the

revamped Watches of Switzerland at Knightsbridge, there is enough to tempt even the more jaded horological palates. But where the area truly scores as an alternative to Bond Street is at Avakian on Sloane Street, one of London's more surprising watch stores.

Part of the surprise is in this jeweller's almost comically international pedigree. Armenian of origin, Bulgarian-born and

Swiss resident Edmond Avakian entered into the family business in 1970s Beirut, from where the business has grown to include boutiques in Geneva and Moscow as well as London. But responsibility for the London store's growing reputation as a watch destination rests with UCL-educated Haig Avakian, Edmond's son, who *QP* visited to look over some watches and learn about Avakian's plans for the future.



(Right) DeLaCour Bichrono with cigar-leaf dial (£10,800) and, in the foreground, the Night Flight Bichrono with two extra time-zones, in black PVD case (£11,800).

(Below) Union Jack marquetry Bichrono from deLaCour (£11,800), with black dial and diamonds version in the background (£36,700). Two separate ETA movements power the Bichrono's two displays.

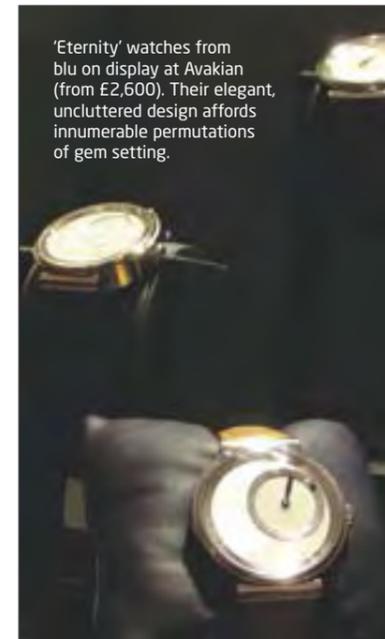


While Avakian remains first and foremost a jeweller, the watches are no mere sideshow. Nowhere else in the country has a brand roster that includes blu, deLaCour, Guy Ellia or Jaquet Droz as well as more familiar names such as Jaeger-LeCoultre and Bovet. Interestingly, this is a list that pulls no punches when it comes to serious watch credibility - where there are diamond and gem-set watches on show, the bling element never over-reaches the horological content.

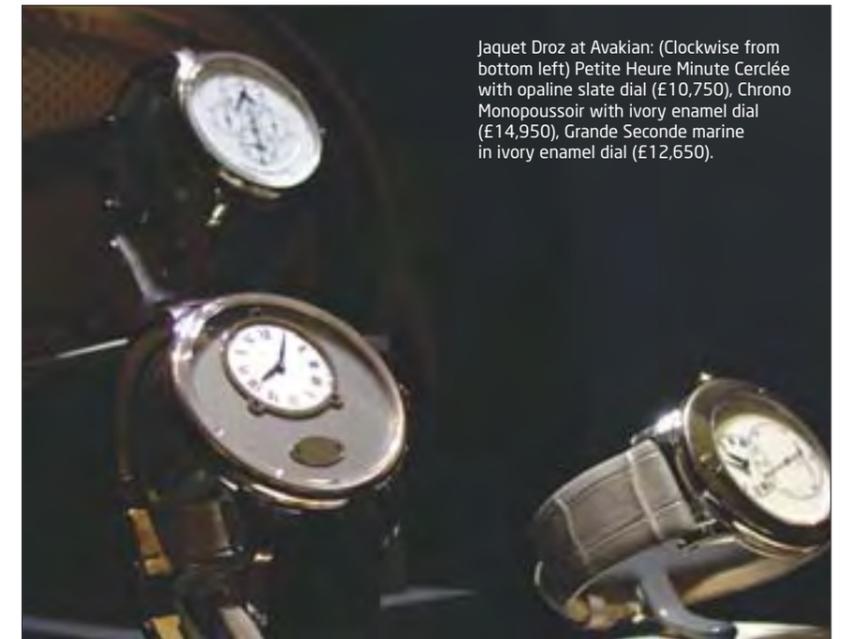
Taking stock

Blu is one such brand, balancing machine and gleam with a truly unique take on time-telling. A small, peripheral minutes dial charts the circumference of an otherwise sparse face every 12 hours, effectively doubling its function as an hour hand. This elegant dance is down to blu's founder, Bernhard Lederer - a fully paid-up member of the 'AHC' independent watchmakers' academy, who 'adapted' (a pusillanimous choice of word in this case) an ETA 2892 base with a module of his own conception. Anyone that doubted the horological purity of his complication was quickly silenced in 2005 by the 'Majesty' double tourbillon, where the minutes subdial was replaced by a carousel flying tourbillon (see 'Boy's Toys', Issue 16).

It was a double tourbillon that staked deLaCour's claim to status too, setting the tone for an eclectic stable that now extends to retrograde automatons for golf and even baseball fans. However, unlike the double-axis tourbillon made by blu, Avakian's leftfield newcomer simply doubled the usual amount of tourbillons, linking the two via a complex differential. The resulting 'side by side' layout of the Bitourbillon marries perfectly with deLaCour's squashed tonneau case - a layout now seen in the simpler, but no-less-gregarious double display of the Bichrono. One spectacular example in store when *QP* visited had a Union Jack dial in wood marquetry; another had a dial made of cigar leaf - Haig's current favourite.



'Eternity' watches from blu on display at Avakian (from £2,600). Their elegant, uncluttered design affords innumerable permutations of gem setting.



Jaquet Droz at Avakian: (Clockwise from bottom left) Petite Heure Minute Cerclée with opaline slate dial (£10,750), Chrono Monopoussoir with ivory enamel dial (£14,950), Grande Seconde marine in ivory enamel dial (£12,650).

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Bitourbillons are no mean feat, and while blu has an AHC watchmaker at the helm, deLaCour's CEO Pierre Koukjian instead turned to Christophe Claret to realise his vision. Refreshingly, his partnership with the complications maestro and his *atelier* of virtuosos remains in the open. However, apart from occasional high-profile pieces like the Jean Dunand project and Harry Winston's Opus 4, Claret rarely takes a bow for his commissions. So it's even more surprising to find a third brand at Avakian whose partnership with Claret is readily revealed - Guy Ellia.

Founded in 1979, the Parisian *haute joaillier's* dramatic but sleek style has recently started to inhabit higher-end models, including the skeletonised Jumbo Chronograph and the dialless Time Space, which turns the perlage mainplate of a Frédéric Piguet movement into something quite celestial. Highlight at Avakian is a rectangular watch with skeletonised Vaucher movement (£42,900). But it is with the Claret tourbillons where Guy Ellia's horological star truly shines. The Zephyr's movement floats eerily in a sandwich of blue sapphire, in a very modern, quite techy evolution of another limited-edition tourbillon, the Magistère.

Despite its popularity in the Far East, Avakian's fourth high-end brand, Jaquet Droz - a Swatch Group brand strangely unavailable elsewhere in the UK - rarely comes bejewelled, instead appealing to those of a more classical bent. "Depuis 1738" is perhaps stretching the lineage somewhat, considering the brand lay dormant from Henry-Louis Jaquet Droz' death in 1791 until Swatch's acquisition in 2000. No matter of course, when such elegant design and execution speaks for itself. All four collections - each named after the *manufactures* that forefather Pierre established throughout Europe - are bound by a sober, economical aesthetic, with subdials framed by screwed-down chapter rings, arranged delicately on slate-grey faces.

And watches under the Avakian name? If the majority of Edmond and son's choice of stock is anything to go by, the collection whispered to be imminent should be a visual feast, with bold use of colour and shape, complemented, of course, by refined gemsetting. *QP* will be back to Sloane Street in just a few months to report on just how Haig Avakian's own watch adventure shapes up. ○