

The watches that have it are flaunting it. Sideways.

# Lateral

Once was a time when the watch techno-geeks and the design-savvy found themselves in two very separate camps. But nowadays, even hardcore watch nerds are wising-up to the benefits of drop-dead gorgeous looks. Meanwhile, those who saw watches as mere arm candy are getting increasingly excited about what lies beneath a pretty face. The result is more emphasis than ever on the non-dial facets of watch cases - be it windows to show off a watch's inner workings from an unusual angle, unexpected drawers to reveal a surprise watch or clever design features that tempt further inspection of the whirring mechanisms within. Welcome to a world of lateral windows and aspirations of transparency - visual and otherwise.

Claire Adler

Showing off is all the rage. At least, that's what a flurry of recent presentations by key watch brands in Basel and Geneva would seem to suggest. But given this is the highest level of luxury we're talking about, it's all done in the best possible taste.

Lateral windows and novel means of peering inside a watch currently abound. At the more whimsical end of the horological spectrum, Van Cleef & Arpels' Etincelle and Tuileries Secret have a surprise drawer that holds the watch - the dial is revealed by

pulling a leaf motif attached to a ring on the side. Towards the more technical end, windows on the edges of cases are providing a fun and refreshing alternative to transparent casebacks, now rife throughout the luxury watch sector thanks to the technology needed to make curved sapphire crystals becoming readily affordable.

Which is timely indeed, as watch companies from Omega and Montblanc to Maurice Lacroix and Panerai are falling over each other to introduce their own in-house

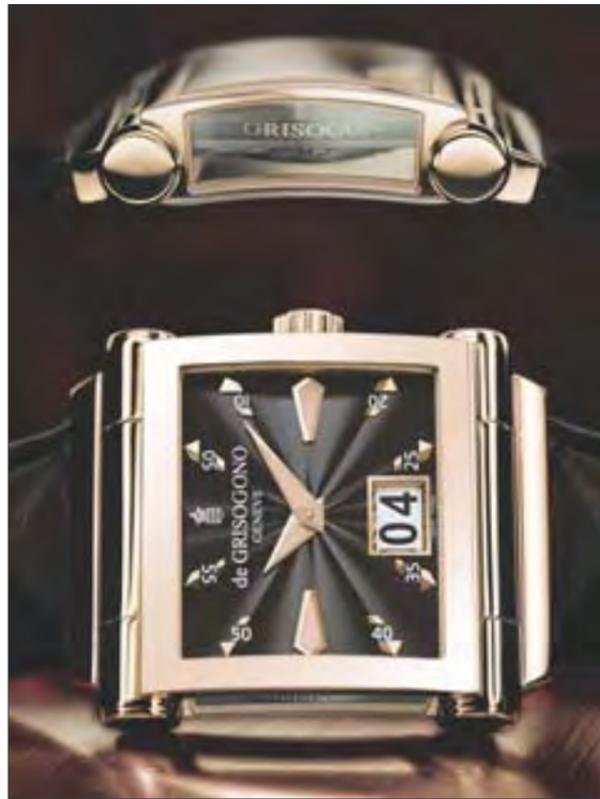
# Thinking



Jean-François Ruchonnet of the DMC Group brought watchmaker Vianney Halter on board to realise his 'Cabestan' concept - the second of Ruchonnet's land/sea/air trilogy, which started with TAG Heuer's V4 Monaco project. Of the Cabestan's many nautical flavours, the strongest is the eponymous 'capstan' or winch layout, with vertically inclined tourbillon and barrels visible from virtually all angles through two sapphire 'hoods'. The fusée mechanism conveniently represents a boat's anchor chain. Black-titanium model pictured, Sfr.394,590.



(Above) Omega's new Hour Vision watches (from £3,075) flaunt a Co-Axial calibre seven years in the making. Read all about its development in Issue 24's 'Acuity'.



De Grisogono's Instrumento Grande offers a glimpse of its automatic ETA movement through the side of a characteristic square case. With typical swagger, de Grisogono's logo even makes it onto the side of a mainplate! N07 model pictured above, £11,900; S05 model pictured above that, £24,000.

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movements with a view to establishing themselves as self-sufficient, *manufacture* brands. And when watch companies like Omega spend seven years developing the new Co-Axial watch movement, it's hardly surprising they want everyone to appreciate it. An unexpected peephole is the perfect way to flash the goods as enticingly as possible. Enter the new De Ville 'Hour Vision' - a watch with a separate sapphire case set into a stainless-steel or red-gold 'cage', with openings on the back, the sides and even between the lugs.

"Having developed the most beautiful, industrialised *manufacture* movement with very high performance, we had to do it justice by showing it in an unusual way," says Jean-Claude Monachon, Head of Product Development for Omega. "The glass apertures aren't just an attractive feature, but a technical breakthrough."

Omega isn't the only brand using an in-house movement and transparent design to drive its market position up to a new level. Montblanc's new Villeret watches also flaunt their inner workings by introducing a rare feature. To view the transparent caseback, you have to open a special 'hunter-style' door, by pressing on the straps where they are attached to the case. This 'cuvette' concept is extreme elegance of the old-fashioned kind. The Villeret 1858 is the first product to emerge from the Richemont Group's newly acquired Minerva factory and part of Montblanc's strategy to take its commitment to serious watchmaking up a notch or three.

### Joy of the machine

But it's more than just watch brands keen to show off their *manufacture* credentials that are embracing lateral windows and views from the edge. Watch lovers themselves are proving to be more enthusiastic than ever about horological minutiae and are welcoming the opportunity to display their connoisseurship.

"Customers are far more technically aware than in the past," says Jonathan Scatchard, the man behind vintageheuer.com and Director of Ogden of Harrogate, one of the UK's oldest jewellers whose stable of watch brands ranges from Glashütte and Breguet to the more design-led Manometro and Ikepod.



No introduction required. Parmigiani's Bugatti watch (£139,000), developed in parallel with the car firm's Veyron supercar, was originally conceived by Vincent Bérard in the late 1990s. Corum funded its first few years' development, before deciding that it didn't match the brand's new direction. Bérard then approached Parmigiani and the concept fitted the brand's new relationship with Bugatti. Slightly less is on show than was originally hoped, due to difficulties encountered by Parmigiani's manufacturing facility, Vaucher in working the crystal and gold in such an extreme fashion.

"People have cottoned onto the fact that although many brands have till now used ETA movements supplied by the Swatch Group, some brands are starting to use their own movements. Many people are looking for a unique watch with unique features."

The Swiss watch industry is returning to the pre-quartz glory days of 30 to 40 years ago, says Scatchard. He claims increased wealth, a mass of information available to consumers over the web and the growth of brand-specific chat forums like those accessed via [timezone.com](http://timezone.com) are all contributing factors. As watch lovers become more savvy and informed they are demanding more technically from the watches they buy. So it's natural they derive pleasure from seeing and displaying a watch's inner workings.

### Up-front

But there's another factor at work here too. San Francisco-based trend

commentator Jody Turner believes the transparency trend is more than merely visual and is relevant for another reason. She says it's not by chance that we are seeing increased consumer interest in how watches are made and who is making their components.

"While transparency in design is apparent at the moment in high-end watches and for example, in Philippe Starck's recent Kartell furniture lines, which use clear plastics with printed patterns, the transparency trend is also philosophical," says Turner. "We are asking companies to be more up-front about what is happening behind the scenes in terms of their relationships to celebrities and the environment and how they make their products."

Harry Winston's 'Tourbillon Glissiere' has a remarkable open-worked movement by Christophe Claret, whose locomotive-style sliding pistons and rails can be admired laterally through four sapphire 'lugs' at each corner. The platinum 'pistons' automatically wind the mainspring (with more than a passing resemblance to the TAG V4's linear winding lug), and you can also manually wind with a key on the caseback. Twenty-five to be made in white gold (pictured, £168,100), 25 in rose gold, plus a unique piece in white gold set with diamonds.





With typical lightness of touch and an irresistible sense of fun, Van Cleef & Arpels' Secret Tuileries XL watch, presented at this year's SIHH trade fair in Geneva, only reveals the time once you slide the dial from its diamond-set case.



A wide opening right through the dial and plate of Greubel Forsey's Tourbillon 24 Secondes Incliné (white-gold model pictured, £141,000), complemented by a lateral window, facilitate visual access to the high-speed 25° inclined tourbillon, whose ultra-light cage (just 0.34 g) seems to enjoy complete liberty of movement, free of any gear-trains.



A domed, hinged cuvette with a release mechanism activated by the strap lugs on Montblanc's Villeret watches opens up elegantly to reveal, in this case, a column-wheel monopusher chronograph movement. Villeret is the town in the Saint-Imier valley where the Institut Minerva de Recherche en Haute Horlogerie is located, bought last year by the Richemont Group, now employed in bringing Montblanc's mechanical watchmaking to a level more befitting the brand's status.



At Tired New York, both the Debonair (pictured, \$9,980) and the Moments collections embrace the transparency factor.

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Sometimes though, lateral windows and attention-grabbing views from the side aren't functional at all. They're purely aesthetic. Design-savvy customers are making greater demands of fine watchmakers too, it seems.

"The more knowledge people have about watches, the more they desire to show it off in the design of the case," says Daniel Lazar, the man behind the Tired New York brand, whose Debonair watch combines a square case with curved side windows, shedding light onto a skeleton movement.

At de Grisogono, never a brand to shy away from showiness, the Instrumento Grande uses intriguing side windows as a marketing opportunity, to cheekily parade its own name. "I wanted to create a new watch

which would not only be aesthetically pleasing but also original in design," says de Grisogono CEO, Fawaz Gruosi.

Then there's the Harry Winston Tourbillon Glissière, whose four windows punctuate a stunningly contemporary openwork movement by Christophe Claret - past collaborator on Opus 4 and the recent Westminster Tourbillon. Similarly, Greubel Forsey's new asymmetric 24 Secondes Incliné features a convex sapphire crystal peephole at 8 o'clock profiling its 25°-inclined tourbillon, which rotates at more than twice the normal rate. Ever since their first 30°-inclined double-axis tourbillon was launched in 2004, Robert Greubel and Stephen Forsey's finishing has hardly veered from flawless, and the new 24 Secondes Incliné should satisfy even the most demanding loupe-wielder.

### High concepts

Taking the emphasis on mechanism, and indeed lateral perspective, to a peak is Parmigiani. The Type 370 'Bugatti' watch - finally unveiled in 2004 after years of development - spaces-out the movement plates along a horizontal rather than vertical axis, to resemble an engine block. This manner of 'exploding' a movement for everyone's visual delight has since caught on. Jacob & Co. (assisted by BNB Concept) has gone perpendicular, putting the Quentin's components on a transverse orientation with a lateral porthole framing the tourbillon. And even more transparency is offered by Vianney Halter's incredible Cabestan concept - set to ship early next year, just over two years after CAD drawings were leaked to the press in January 2006. Conceived and marketed by Jean-François Ruchonnet's DMC Group (they of the flashy watch animations seen on most watch websites), Cabestan's two sapphire 'hoods' flaunt a movement with more resemblance to a Victorian steam engine than anything worn on a wrist before.

Keen watchspotters who have warmed to the transparency trend will be pleased to know that although Maurice Lacroix didn't show a watch with lateral windows at Basel this year, one no less than spectacular is billed for 2008 release. The Mémoire 1 will have raised glass on the dial and sapphire glass on the sides, allowing full view of a bent seconds hand as it sweeps precisely along the tachygraph counter. Given the incredible technical achievement promised by CEO Philippe Merk at Baselworld - a mechanical watch whose three hands can be switched between time and running chronograph functions - watch fans will be grateful for any glimpse into what's likely to be a revolutionary movement.

However, "A movement alone is not enough," warns Tired's Daniel Lazar. "It has to be accompanied by innovative design. But this is not a passing trend, complications will become more innovative too. These are not your father's watches." ◯