



# Bombshell

⌚ Be surprised. Be very surprised, if you, like me and the Editor of this magazine thought Jacob & Co. did not go beyond wrist-mounted diamond extravaganzas favoured by footballers, their wives and other bling-hungry, horologically challenged folk with too much money burning holes in their fashionably distressed jeans. Like Jacob's famous five-time-zone watches, 'Quentin' is, naturally, a behemoth - but the similarities end there. In fact, this technical marvel bears little similarity to any other watch in existence, thanks to a vertically mounted tourbillon, sapphire crystal 'hood', barrel indicators and 31-day power reserve. No, that's not a typo: the watch really does run for 31 continuous days. *QP* meets founder Jacob Arabo - self-appointed jeweller to the stars and promising horological visionary.

**Maria Doultton**

(Above) Cuff destroyer: the Quentin measures 56 x 47 x 21.5 mm, and weighs 380 g. The balance vibrates at 21,600 vph, and will continue to vibrate for 744 hours - a whole month - once fully wound.



(Above) Jacob Arabo, wearing his classic five-time-zone watch. Known simply as 'Jacob the Jeweller' to fans of his diamond-encrusted 'bling', the 41-year-old Uzbeki immigrant has lived in Manhattan since he was 16. Arabo's watch and jewellery empire, which now boasts a boutique on 57th Street, came under threat in June after he was arrested by the FBI indicted on a conspiracy charge for laundering drug money belonging to the Black Mafia Group, receiving large sums of currency for various pieces of jewellery and failing to fill in tax forms. His defense lawyer said, "The arrest of Mr Arabo is the result of an unfortunate misunderstanding... We are confident that once the government is advised of all the facts... all of the charges against Mr Arabo will be completely dismissed."

(Right) The Quenttin's \$12,000 presentation case, complete with winder, fingerprint-recognition security lock and alarm.



Unquestionably, it was an amazing coup for Jacob & Co. In 2002, the jewellery firm introduced its first timepieces, tapping directly into a need for even bigger, flashier watches. So much so that Jacob soon became known as the 'king of bling', amassing hoards of celebrity fans throughout the overtly affluent worlds of hip hop, basketball and - across the pond - football. Sean Combs, 50 Cent, Justin Timberlake, the Beckhams, Elton John - they're all Jacob converts. Since then, through 400 points of sale, the firm has sold some 8,000 mainly steel and diamond watches.

However, from the standpoint of QP's lofty towers, where the thin air of fine horology blows, this was not a good start. After all, the first Jacob & Co. watch was the heavily 'iced-out' Five Time Zone - the epitome of shallow bling-bling, and hardly helped by the fact that each time zone was driven by an individual quartz movement; sacrilege to the watch snob. Which is why the next chapter of this story is far more intriguing, meriting a visit to Jacob & Co.'s suite at Claridge's Hotel on a blustery May morning.

Beneath an oil painting of a horse in the style of Stubbs, Uzbekistan-born Jacob Arabo, founder of his eponymous jewellery and watch house, is sitting on a heavily upholstered sofa. Wearing a dark blue, double-breasted suit with discreet, pink pin stripes, his wavy hair slicked back, he hands me a chunky rose-gold watch. The four sub-dials make it clear that this is a five-time zone model, but there is something wrong. Where are the diamonds? Where are the geometric blocks of primary colours?

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The answer is that things have changed at Jacob & Co. For a start, the handsome Five Time Zone Automatic 'H24', replete with uncharacteristic elegance and restraint, sports an adapted ETA A07.111 automatic movement, developed in conjunction with Bunter SA of Switzerland - a well-respected house established in 1830 that specialises in jewellery watches. Bunter has worked for Jacob since the brand's inception, as well as the likes of Piaget and Harry Winston.

### Rise of the machine

But next comes the real surprise. Arabo has strapped onto his wrist a contraption approximately the size of a cigarette packet. Though visible from half a Manhattan block away, closer inspection is needed to ascertain whether this 56 mm x 47 mm box of tricks is in fact a watch and not a wrist-mounted musical box, or seismic alert device. Don't be surprised if you find yourself scratching your head: the Quenttin had the same effect on US Customs officials, who took a lot of convincing by Arabo to believe that what he was wearing on his wrist was indeed a watch.

Quenttin is so-called because, like the Latin name, it indicates the fifth scion; the fifth automatic movement from the brand. It is the world's first vertical tourbillon boasting a jaw-dropping 31-day power reserve, and quite simply an astounding piece; as attention-grabbing as any of his diamond-set behemoths - and not just because of its size. To his credit, Arabo is quick to reveal that Quenttin was the lovechild of his close relationship with Bunter SA, with the movement developed and made exclusively by BNB Concept SA: "My Swiss partners who take my visions and make them a reality - an extremely positive collaboration."

BNB completes the triangle as watchmaker, working alongside Bunter to realise Arabo's vision. The founders, Messrs Barbasini, Navas and Buttet (all ex-Franck Muller) lend the company its name, and, in BNB's brief three-year lifespan, have already worked for their old employer as well as (allegedly) Hublot and De Witt, mainly developing tourbillons. Jacob & Co. remains BNB's biggest customer though, and they are behind the incredible machine that confronts me at Claridge's.

Arabo explains the inspiration for the Quenttin: "I wanted a vertical tourbillon on the side of the watch as well as a 31-day power reserve. I remember Patek Philippe had a 10-day power



(Above) An elegant newcomer to Jacob's traditionally garish stable, the 'H24' automatic was a surprising evolution of the famous five-time-zone concept, launched at Baselworld this year. BNB Concept adapted the time-only ETA caliber A07.111 to give Jacob & Co. a proprietary complication. Limited to 1,800 steel pieces, 180 pieces in gold and 99 pieces in platinum. Red-gold model pictured (\$49,000).

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And so the layout of the movement bears remarkable similarity to the Soviet instrument. One of the main features of this watch is that it likes every clever bit of engineering to be on show. The seven spring-barrels of the manually wound movement are strung along a horizontal axis beneath the Quenttin's crystal sapphire 'hood', as clearly visible as the time and power reserve, which are read off three more barrels instead of a dial, thus balancing the mainsprings aesthetically.



(Left) The Baguette Rainbow Tourbillon progresses the Bunter/BNB multi-time-zone tourbillon concept this year, with a completely new method of setting diamonds. According to Claude Sanz of Bunter, it took 10 years to develop a process of paving the dial with absolutely no visible gold between the crystal and diamonds. Thus, nothing impedes the light entering or leaving the diamonds, creating a new level of brilliance. Costing \$1,000,000, the watch is limited to six pieces only, and was already spotted on the wrist of David Beckham at his Full-Length and Fabulous pre-World Cup party in May. (Above) The multi-coloured version of the 25-time-zone Rainbow Tourbillon in platinum with diamonds (\$365,000).

The seven winding barrels are made of rose gold; ironically, a metal chosen to echo the humbler copper of Arabo's Soviet childhood. According to Bunter's CEO Claude Sanz, the power is only fed into the movement from the seventh barrel though, which is kept topped-up by the other six, connected in series 'upstream'. This means that the difference in torque between the 1st and 31st days of the Quenttin's power reserve is never more than that of one barrel, rather than the sum of all seven. It is things like this that make Sanz rightly proud of his baby: "Jacob always had this idea of making something crazy and 'out of this world' and it was my job to bring this vision into the world. Admittedly, I didn't know what he had in mind for a while, but we and the guys at BNB just kept brainstorming, keeping a tight communication between the three of us, until it all 'clicked'. Over its two and half year development we encountered no problems, only lots of difficulties. And we overcame them all..."

### Power house

Of course, the downside of the Quenttin's month-long power reserve is that it takes between 10 and 15 minutes to wind up. The watch's 10 kg, \$12,000 box, shaped to mimic its occupant's bold design, offers some help with this matter. A fingerprint sensor will open the robotic case and once correctly placed and shut will insert a probe into the crown and wind your watch. The box - developed by an engineer who builds helicopters in his spare time - does even more than that though: it has lights, an alarm and even a tracker unit, should a robber with big biceps steal your Quenttin away.

The winding and setting is very simple and very clever. You use the flip-up tab at 2 o'clock to wind the watch manually, and another tab at 9 o'clock changes the function of the 2 o'clock tab from winder to time setter. That the Quenttin is also designed

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for relatively easy assembly is, in itself, worthy of merit. The one-minute tourbillon is set into carbon-fibre applications on the side of the case, which allows easy access for maintenance, and of course affords high visibility, in the unlikely event that you manage to hide this behemoth under your shirt cuff.

Holding his hand out, Arabo admires the watch and comments: "It's not a dressy watch, you know. Tomorrow for example, I will wear it for lunch at Cipriani's. So far, the collectors are loving it; even David Beckham wants to buy one but he will have to wait three to four months. Thierry Stern [of Patek Philippe fame] came to see me at the Basel Watch Fair and he was shocked; he said that he wished he had his name on this dial. We're friends you see..."

At \$360,000 and weighing in at 380 g, only 135 pieces will be made - a figure that still seems ambitiously high for such a complex watch. As Arabo himself points out: "It is difficult to make any great quantities of watches in Switzerland. But I intend to drop a bomb like this every year."

### Broad palette

So are we witnessing a Pauline conversion from the king of bling? Not so - just a matter of timing and logistics, it turns out. "When I first started making watches my original plan was to make my own movements; it's every man's dream. But it takes time to make a mechanical five-time-zone movement, so I started developing it with my Swiss partners, Bunter SA. This is why I had to start with quartz and diamonds. But from day one, I was working on the mechanical version."

"Since I was a child I was passionate about watches and in the summer, when we moved to the United States, I used to help out a local jeweller. I fell in love with watchmaking and since then I have always collected watches. I started 20 years ago by making jewellery, but I wanted to make a watch for my wife Angela's birthday on the 11th April in 2002. And this is how the first Jacob & Co. watch was born. Everything I do is big, so my first watch was too: a five-time-zone on a yellow strap with a diamond-set dial. I didn't think I was going to distribute



(Above) Weighing in at \$360,000, only 135 examples of the Quenttin will be made - 99 pieces in white gold, 18 pieces in rose gold and 18 in magnesium. Platinum on request.



(Left) The 32-time-zone World GMT (from \$15,800 for stainless-steel version to \$89,000 for platinum), driven automatically by ETA's time-only A07.111 calibre, adapted by Bunter and BNB with a complication exclusive to Jacob & Co. Limited to 1,800 pieces, the 47.5 mm case boasts a transparent caseback. (Above) This one-off version of Jacob & Co.'s The World is Yours model was designed specially for the Beckhams' World Cup party on May 21st, showcasing a striking world map design with white diamond oceans and deep red ruby continents, incorporating 4.50 carats of rubies and diamonds, carried on a full 3.75 carat white pavé diamond case. The surrounding bezel frames the dial with an additional 5.00 carats of diamonds, for a total of 13.25 carats. The proceeds from the sale of the watch (worth \$120,000) went to UNICEF.

them but I started getting calls from customers asking for them." It did help that he gave several of these watches to high-profile personalities such as Madonna, Sean Combs and Elton John. But according to Jacob they all bought more pieces and David Beckham was soon queuing up for his and Elton John ordered a further twenty. Fondly holding one of the original yellow, blue and white diamond JC1 Five Time Zones, Arabo continues, "I call it the rich man's coloured watch - starting at \$12,000, who else would buy a watch full of colours? I love it myself and no one else was doing this at the time."

That Jacob & Co. should be looking at bizarre, showy mechanical watches like the Quenttin could mean two things: that Jacob is adept at spotting the next trend or that he is serious about developing benchmark complications. Whichever way, he is the first to bring the looks of pre-perestroika gas meters to the wrist and add a large dose of fun and irreverence to watchmaking. That his watches are evolving can only be seen as a positive move. "In a few years, I want to be a combination of Patek Philippe, Richard Mille and Chopard." Let's see what Jacob's next bomb brings... ○

**Further information:** Jacob & Co. is available at Harrods, Tel: 020 7730 1234. Also stocked by Theo Fennell and select Watches of Switzerland stores. See website for all stockist info: [www.jacobandco.com](http://www.jacobandco.com). All watches are available in a plain case, in different metals from steel to gold to platinum, to diamond encrusted. Watches can be requested with varying carats (from 2.00 to 3.20 in the 40 mm size and 3.25 to 5.00 in the 47 mm size) and prices vary accordingly.