

# The Rise of a Star

**i** François-Paul Journe's career is about to scale new heights. Over a series of short articles, *QP* will be explaining how this particular watchmaker has come to be hailed as the greatest of his age. Here, we reveal how John Asprey's commission in the mid-1980s proved vital to Journe's education.

James Gurney



The Marseilles watch school's expulsion of one M. François-Paul Journe will, no doubt, draw comparison to the rejection letters sent to JK Rowling - the difference in commercial value more than made up by the increasing significance attached to the talent possessed by Journe.

Why devote a series of articles to one of the many excellent watchmakers currently leading young companies? Well, it isn't just our opinion that elevates Journe from the ordinary. While the start of his horological career may have been ill-starred, his abilities were evident enough for others to encourage him, even in a notoriously slow-developing craft. First his uncle - a respected watchmaker in Paris - and then the wider world.

It was in 1987, some 10 years after his eventual graduation, that Simon Bull, then of Christie's, brought Journe to the attention of the one person who was able to both appreciate Journe's talent and provide the challenge needed to develop it: John Asprey - Chairman of the famous Bond Street luxury goods store.

A fresh-faced François-Paul Journe at work on the Sympathique clock in the 1980s.

## Improving on Breguet

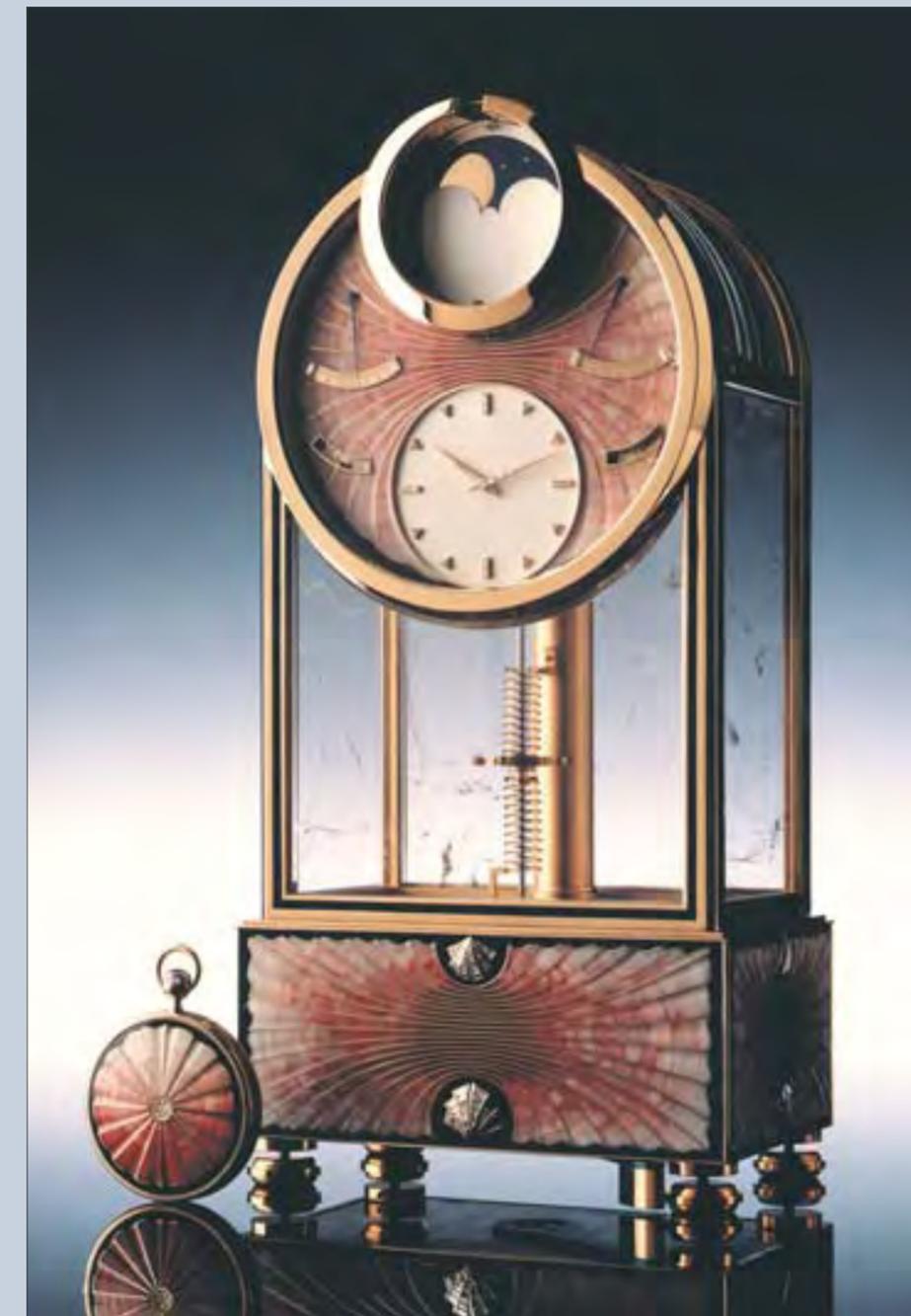
Asprey recalls that it was soon clear from the work Journe had already done that there was a real potential. After discussing several other ideas, he commissioned Journe to recreate one of the most difficult of Breguet's inventions, the Sympathique. Journe also gained something else: the long-term support and respect of a man with both influence and experience.

The idea of the Sympathique was that the greater accuracy and stability of a table clock could be used to regulate a pocket watch. The clock is made with a nest (or more understandably in this iPod era, a 'docking station'), which synchronises the pocket watch with the clock. It was, of course, not enough to merely copy the idea - Journe also wished to improve on it. Where the original needed to be rewound every day, Journe determined to give his at least eight days' power reserve.

The commission took Journe three years to complete and involved his studying and analysing every aspect of Breguet's idea. According to Journe, it was as much the dead-ends and failures that made the project so important to his development - an attitude that found favour with John Asprey.

In appraising Journe's stature as a watchmaker, John Asprey makes the point that it was Journe's ability to go beyond copying and following the masters of the past that revealed the level of talent Journe possessed. "At each turn, he came up with something truly original. I was highly impressed." Asprey's only regret concerning the project is that he should have had the courage to commission more than the original three. "There is always a market for excellence," he notes.

Ideas continue to flow, as the stream of recent creations from the house of FP Journe reveals, and he continually probes the limits of the possible. "Journe absorbs difficult ideas without much comment initially. But then, months later, the phone will go and a solution will have emerged." So how highly does John



Asprey rate this talent? "He is the Abraham-Louis Breguet of today, no doubt about it." And it is not only Asprey that rates Journe. While you would not expect Patek Philippe's Philippe Stern to make quite such a pronouncement, he readily admits his admiration. We at *QP* are happy to agree with such eminent opinion. **o**

Decorated in pink coral, one of Journe's three Pendule Sympathique clocks, made under commission from John Asprey. The accompanying pocket watch, which is regulated by the pendulum clock, sits beside it. Its 'docking station' is positioned above the clockface.

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