

A Bridge So Far

Bedeck your coffee table with this lavish account of Girard-Perregaux's illustrious past

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Girard-Perregaux
By François Chaille

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GIRARD-PERREGAUX



Like the company whose tale it tells, *Girard-Perregaux* is a hard book to assess. As a rule, lavish brand histories fall into one of two categories. In the cases of Tissot and Panerai, their recently published histories leave out nothing, veering toward the academic, while being beautiful enough productions to satisfy bibliophiles who cherish paper quality and photo content. Such books almost ignore the role of 'selling tool' in the interests of near-pedagogic veracity and credibility. Collectors, auction houses, dealers, anoraks, and yes, watch journalists love such books, dripping as they are with minutiae.

At the other extreme are books that lean more toward the visual, like the Tiffany saga reviewed in Issue 14, thus ensuring appeal to a far wider audience. *Girard-Perregaux* hovers somewhere in between, but closer to the latter than the former. Which puzzles me, because nothing about G-P is lightweight. Girard-Perregaux - the brand rather than the book - is in the very odd position of being a true manufacture, with its own in-house movements. Yet it is rarely the first name that comes to mind when 'horolophiles' are kvetching over their brandies as to what houses are 'real' in the sense of making their own movements. G-P should certainly be grouped with Chopard, Patek, Lange and Rolex, and yet it is often overlooked, which suggests hiding one's light under a bushel. And this book is a case in point.

Visual feast

If sheer watchmaking credibility is the most important value a brand can have, then G-P need bow to no-one. However, *Girard-Perregaux* lacks the wealth of techno-verbiage, charts, tables, cutaways, exploded drawings and other scholarly trappings that would convince any reader of the company's expertise. Okay, so there is a gatefold showing what is inside a Vintage 1945 and an exploded drawing of a GP3000, but in many ways this comes across as the World's Most Lavish Catalogue.

Make no mistake: its history is told in reasonable detail. You will learn, for example, how Girard-Perregaux created what many consider to be the first true production wristwatch. You will learn of its roots in the earliest days of Swiss horology, and its key part in the foundation of the Swiss watch industry. You will appreciate the detail behind 1957's revolutionary 'Gyromatic' - the system that replaced the traditional click-wheels in self-winding mechanisms with uni-directional clutches on rollers, enabling the combination of



accuracy with sturdiness in a small case. You will learn how G-P developed the first 36,000 vph mechanical movement. You will read with dismay about how G-P's success in quartz turned out to be a double-edged sword in the early '70s. And of course, there is the company's work with tourbillons. (The iconic 'Tourbillon with Three Gold Bridges' pocket watch graces the covers - an example from ca 1893 that turned up in Argentina in the 1970s.) But despite all this history, you will still leave the book the way you would a Reader's Digest condensation of a novel.

Conversely, if you value books that make a coffee table groan under their weight, this 11.5" x 10", 4 lb monster will dazzle you. Value for money is undeniable. The designers opted for the thickest paper stock imaginable, worthy of any art book, and they have lavished whole-page photos on individual timepieces. It is more a feast for the eye than the intellect, and in that respect, it ranks with the best.

(Above) Quartz wristwatch from 1970, which vibrated at 32,768 vph - the frequency later adopted by all quartz watchmakers and still the universal standard today. This model was the first quartz timepiece to be industrially produced in Switzerland.

(Left) A Girard-Perregaux hunter watch from ca 1795 - one of the first of its kind. Its extra-thin movement fist into an engraved and machine-guilloché case decorated in dark blue and hues of gold.



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Hand-driven watchmaker's lathe, ca 1870, currently on show at the Girard-Perregaux museum, which opened in 1991 - the year of G-P's bicentenary.



As a total watch nerd though, I wanted to read more about Dottore Macaluso - the saviour of the company - and what has inspired him ever since 1987, when he became G-P's Italian distributor, through 1992 when he bought the watchmaker, up to the present day. I also wanted to read about the rebirth of the Daniel JeanRichard name. Conversely, readers of all stripes will be more than satisfied with the amount of text devoted to G-P's (recently terminated) relationship with Ferrari, the story of Villa Marguerite and the G-P museum, and myriad episodes in the brand's 200-year-plus history; to say nothing of the absolutely flawless, mouth-watering 'portrait' shots of classic models.

But maybe G-P could consider publishing a 'sad git's supplement', filled with model names, production dates and figures, lists of all the movements and other dry data. Even on a CD-ROM? Just for us anoraks. ○

Further information:

Girard-Perregaux, www.girard-perregaux.com, www.flammarion.com

(Left) Vintage 1945 Tourbillon with Three Gold Bridges, from 2000. G-P's trademark gold bridges were revived in wristwatch form in 1991 to mark its bicentenary. The Vintage line was first produced in 1945, and revived in 1995.