

JeanRichard's new minute repeater (£167,860) is housed in a TV Screen case, instead of the usual round case befitting the circular shape of the internal gongs.



Striking Out

JeanRichard's blooming independence is bolstered by its boldest move yet: a minute repeater that proves it's hip to be square

Maria Doultou



The crystal caseback is protected by a grid whose design is inspired by the 'cock' of a minute repeater that Daniel JeanRichard produced in 1710.

"The idea is to do something different. We are at the stage where we are finding our own direction," says Massimo Macaluso of his barely 10-year-old watch firm. JeanRichard is finally striking out on its own and moving from beneath the shadow of big brother, Girard-Perregaux. To say that JeanRichard is entirely separate from Girard-Perregaux would be taking the matter too far though. It is enough to say that a strong element of independent development is the policy in place. A stone's throw from each other on a gentle hillside in La-Chaux-de-Fonds, both firms belong to the Sowind Group, owned by Macaluso's father, Dr Luigi Macaluso; rally-car champion, architect and one of the most original thinkers in the business.

There is no better proof of this coming-of-age than the house's latest creation presented at Geneva's SIHH in April: a minute repeater that breaks with aesthetic tradition. JeanRichard has chosen one of *haute horlogerie's* most beautiful complications and housed it in the cool, uncluttered lines of a white-gold TV Screen case. It catches the light as gracefully as an E-Type or a Frank Gehry building.

Autonomy

But this is not just a style statement or an impetuous contradiction. It is carefully thought-out nurturing of a young brand. Until 2004, movements produced by third parties such as ETA, and complication modules created by houses like Dubois

Dépraz, Unitas and Jaquet-Baume whirred away beneath the dials of JeanRichard watches. Apart from the retrogrades, all the 'small' complications are now produced in-house and the intention is to create more. We saw evidence of this increased autonomy last year in its first manufacture calibre (the JR1000, in the Paramount Square) and two years previously, in a tourbillon.

This year, the march towards independence and increased manufacturing capability continues. Producing 10,000 pieces a year, the firm furnishes five of its models with in-house calibres. Plans are to expand the number of such models and to raise production to around 25,000. JeanRichard has also taken the unusual stance of only using sapphire crystal backs on models with a manufacture movement. "For our future growth, it is necessary to do things in-house. If we know the secrets of the complications, it is better for us," states Macaluso Jr. "Our aim is to become a niche product and move away from the more popular market."

With the minute repeater in my hands, the attention to detail is immediately evident in the unusual guilloché work on the dial. Intricate but contemporary engravings of ribbon-like waves flutter across an otherwise sober metal dial, giving the watch a toned-down, funky feel. "The watch industry has a tradition of finding different ways to do the same thing," says Macaluso of the handsome minute repeater. "But we wanted to make a watch that you could play with and enjoy."



Like its ancestor from 1710, the new piece is fitted with an external adjustment device, allowing the owner to adjust the precision of the movement. This device, essential in its time, is fitted not out of necessity, but to add an aspect of play in the watch.

The uncluttered lines of the white-gold TV Screen case catch the light as gracefully as an E-Type or a Frank Gehry building.

Mini concerto

By its very complication, this is a limited edition of 6 pieces. The mechanism has been developed in co-operation with the prestigious Christophe Claret manufacture, who recently collaborated with de Grisogono on the 'Occhio' minute repeater. The 12 lignes, JR88 calibre is hand-wound, running at 18,000 vph, with a 48-hour minimum power reserve. Even on your wrist, the clear chimes of the hammers striking against the two coiled 'gongs' are distinctly audible. However, on its very own wooden resonator box, the chiming becomes a mechanical mini-concerto. Lest we forget that JeanRichard is aiming to combine modernity with audacious creativity, the resonator box is an architectural creation in its own right. The beautifully honed object is made of pear tree and picea wood, developed by a craftsman who normally restores Stradivarius violins.

But there is even more hands-on fun to be had with this piece, as Macaluso is eager to demonstrate. Turning the streamlined case over, he reveals what would appear to be a shocking



Each of the six minute repeaters from JeanRichard comes with a wooden resonator box, built by a violin restorer.

anachronism: an ornately decorated round grille, known as a 'cock', which flips up to reveal the crystal back of the watch. Macaluso explains that the cock is a homage to the marque's deliberate namesake Daniel JeanRichard. The legendary watchmaker produced a remarkable minute repeater of his own in 1710, with a similar cock. Today, decorated with elaborate Louis XIV-style swirling foliage and flowers, it is mere folly, but adds to the owner's pleasure.

There is one more playful twist to the watch. Like the 1710 model, the watch is fitted with an external adjustment device. By way of a key, the owner can truly interact with his watch, adjusting the ratchet to temper the precision of the movement (or, more simply, fiddle to his heart's desire).

But for all the youthful boldness of this unusual minute repeater, the hand of Macaluso Sr is evident. "We are moving in a different direction from Girard-Perregaux, but there is a familial mood to all our watches, as they are all overseen by my father," explains Massimo. And that cannot be a bad thing, especially when your father is one of the most respected figures in the luxury watch industry. ○

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