



One of the 45 platinum Opus V watches from Harry Winston Rare Timepieces, developed with Felix Baumgartner. The dice-shaped satellite-hours are set asymmetrically and lend a dramatic feeling of depth to the open dial. Additionally, 45 pieces will be made in pink gold, seven pieces in platinum, set with white full-cut diamonds and three in platinum, set with white baguette-cut diamonds.

# For the dice-rolling

Harry Winston takes its chances with yet another outrageous Opus

Theodore Diehl



Harry Winston Rare Timepieces' prescient choice of 'Opus' collaborators has thrown up some daring designs over the years - most notably Vianney Halter's Opus III, whose porthole display could be one of the most intriguing creations in recent memory. Opus V, the latest and last of the current series, yet again takes a radically different approach to telling the time. Felix Baumgartner is the visionary, and the rolling dice 'satellite-hour' system is the concept - more at home on the wrist of Batman than you or I.



Maximillian Büsser has chosen wisely throughout the Opus saga. Over the first four years, the CEO for Harry Winston Rare Timepieces recruited a veritable Who's Who of watchmakers – Journe, Prezioso, Halter, Claret... But who this year? Meet Felix Baumgartner. Not the BASE jumper famous for freefalling across the Channel strapped to Red Bull-liveried wings, but one half of a little-known Geneva partnership called Urwerk. Alongside designer Martin Frei, Urwerk's philosophy has always been to attempt the extraordinary, and the limelight it finally deserves will undoubtedly be afforded by this year's collaboration with HWRT.

### Prehistory

When Felix Baumgartner and Martin Frei began their collaboration to create the Urwerk brand, putting hands on a watch was a taboo for them. Their idea was literally to go back to the beginning of timekeeping ('ur' in German means the first; the oldest; an original source) in order to

adapt and interpret the sundial and other non-mechanical timekeeping methods for the wrist. The UR-101 and UR-102, with an orbiting portal for the hours and a minute arc was Urwerk's first creation, followed by its popular UR-103 model. This was a great success that quickly sold out and is now being released in various different versions – the latest being the UR-103.03, presented at Basel this year.

The design of the UR-103 is beautiful in its simplicity. Inspired by examples of star-wheel calibres from pocket watches, a four-armed cross carrying 'numerical satellites' turns slowly against an arc-shaped minute scale to show the time. With a new glass aperture on the UR-103.03, the satellites' motion effects a whole new experience of the passing hours, shifting one's usual fixation with the passage of minutes to the background. Something restful, reminiscent of the motion of the heavens at night resides in the movement.



(Left) The crown of Opus V is concealed behind a click-spring protector that swivels upwards like the gull-wing door of a car – another first that adds to the distinctive asymmetrical architecture of the watch. Do not kid yourself about the water resistance though; although the protector makes it look tougher than nails, the watch is only water resistant to 30 meters.

(Right) By turning the crown, three springs (coupled with the three blocks) not only reverse the satellite-hour system's rotational direction in order to move the hours back, but also absorb the shock of the minute-hand's return.

(Below) Since the three blocks only show figures 1 through 12, Opus V indicates whether it is day or night with a counter between 7 and 8 o'clock.



Since the minute hand has to cover a long distance (120°) before returning to zero, it is brought back by a highly resistant traction spring, wound by a ring fixed to the ball-bearing mechanism. The satellite-hour system, as it turns, drives the entire ring. When the hand reaches the figure 60, a double star is released, in turn releasing the spring.

This is where the similarities to the Opus V begin. It too places emphasis upon the hours, displaying their steady passage using three orbiting 'satellites', rather than hands. Another common thread is the use of depth in the movement design. This is probably the most difficult thing to get used to, as most watches are very 'flat' in profile – we rarely see beyond the dial. Eliminate the dial, give the movement an additional role in the visual formula, and the results are novel and attractive.

### Merry-go-round

The Opus V develops the Urwerk concept furthermore. Here, what I would call three 'dice', each with four numbers on adjacent sides, are used to indicate the 12 hours. Dice 1 has the numbers 2, 5, 8 and 11;

dice 2 has 3, 6, 9 and 12; and dice 3 has 4, 7, 10 and 1.

The upper faces of the three dice are the most visible, but only the one aligned with the large minute pointer (the only timekeeping hand on the watch) shows the current hour. The other two are the future hours, slowly advancing towards their start point, adjacent to '0' minutes.

The minutes are shown on an arc placed along one side; almost a vestigial remnant of a classical watch dial. Once the retrograde minute hand reaches 60, a spring releases and returns it to 0, aligning and locking itself to the new hour, which arrives at that very moment. In this fashion, the minutes and hour travel in full

companionship until the next new hour arrives at 0 and the process is repeated.

After the previous hour has left the minute arc at 60, it is gently turned over, so that the die's new face shows the hour that is due after the other two dice have finished their turns. This is why the numbers on the faces jump by three: 2, 5, 8 etc.

Love it or hate it, one must applaud the ingenuity and creativity required to reach such a refined level of simplicity. A 5-day power reserve indicator and an unusual day and night indicator cap the timekeeping side of the watch.

The back holds yet more surprises however – Baumgartner's second major



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innovation for Harry Winston. Here, a service indicator records up to 5 years of actual usage, visually signalling the necessary time for oiling and regulating. A great idea.

### Positive strides

Another detail found on the back might be a bit more controversial: a fine adjustment screw that allows the user to directly alter the Opus V's timing, plus or minus 30 seconds per day. This will undoubtedly drive watchmakers crazy. Nevertheless, the philosophy behind it is to empower the watch owner. Baumgartner's idea is that watches must exist in contrasting environments, and endure all sorts of activities. Should any of these affect timekeeping, the owner can take control and make the necessary adjustments himself.

The conservatives among us may balk at such heresy, but it cannot be denied that

these are all positive horological strides. While most 20<sup>th</sup> century watchmaking has been about miniaturisation, Urwerk thinks it is time to start thinking of new ways to tell the time. Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it must surely be time to venture into uncharted territories and at the very least go along for the ride, if only out of curiosity.

That does not mean of course that every daring design is a marvel, or that you have to like it. However, such creations do deserve our attention. Watches, despite their mundane and useful nature, share similarities with art. Even if you do not like Picasso, a van Dijk portrait will never look quite the same after a brush with Cubism. It is the perspective-altering experience that counts.

And the Opus V fits this bill perfectly in my opinion. ○

(Top) Felix Baumgartner (left) is the latest in an impressive lineage of Opus collaborators chosen by CEO of Harry Winston Rare Timepieces, Maximilian Büsser (right).

(Above) Baumgartner and designer Martin Frei's partnership, 'Urwerk' launched its latest creation, the UR-103.03 this year, pictured here in white gold (SFr.55,000). The Opus V's 'Satellite-Hour' system is derived directly from the indication system developed at Urwerk for the UR-103.

### Further information:

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