

# Interface

Janek Deleskiewicz bridges Jaeger's traditional aesthetic with a modern design ethic

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The Vallée de Joux is practically a nation state of its own. Just a couple of hours from London by car and plane, it might as well be in the rainforests of the Southern Hemisphere or high in the Tibetan mountains. Life is lived at a different pace; a pace ideally suited to the vocation of *haute horlogerie*. Which is what makes the character of Janek Deleskiewicz - Creative Director of Jaeger-LeCoultre - all the more remarkable. Since joining the company over 15 years ago, he has divided his time between Paris and the Vallée - a frankly schizophrenic existence: Friday to Monday in the City of Light; Tuesday to Thursday amidst the clanking cowbells of the Vallée. Such a fractured existence might have polished-off a less balanced man, but Deleskiewicz seems to thrive on the contrast, and the benefits reaped by Jaeger itself are incalculable.

The Master Eight Day Perpetual (platinum variant pictured; £35,050), made available from October 2004. Like most Jaeger lines developed since the brand's resurrection in the late 1980s, Deleskiewicz has played a significant role in the evolution of the eclectic Master range.

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Steel variant of the 'Idéale' - Jaeger's big launch from October (mechanical JLC846 calibre, £3,850; quartz JLC608 calibre, £3,300). The diamond-encrusted lugs are a common feature.

### The go-between

With his cropped hair, smart suits and relaxed urbane manner, Janek Deleskiewicz is equally at home toying with a plate of sushi in New York's SoHo, or sitting down to a supper of raclette in a mountain chalet. He is at once the personification of the brand in the wider world and the conduit through which the needs of the urban sophisticate who wears Jaeger-LeCoultre (think Pierce Brosnan in *The Thomas Crown Affair*) are channelled back to the watchmakers at their benches in the Vallée. "I think it is very important to have one foot in the city and one foot in the manufacture. It takes a lot of energy but my job is to take information from inside and outside. I can work with the two worlds to make the synthesis." CEOs may come and go (currently Jaeger is run by a young man called Jerome Lambert) but Deleskiewicz is anchored in the traditions of this brand, having been with the marque since it was woken from a decades-long coma by the late Günther Blümlein.

Now, as a part of the Richemont Group, Jaeger-LeCoultre is one of the better known high

watchmaking houses operating today: the Reverso is one of the world's most readily identifiable horological signatures. Last spring at Geneva's SIHH fair, it premiered the striking Gyrotourbillon and a remarkable diamond and ruby 'Rock Setting' jumbo Reverso; its Master Compressor line of watches has also given the brand a strong foothold in the butch watch market. October of this year also saw Jaeger launch Deleskiewicz's latest coup - the Idéale. An attempt to woo women with a proper watch that is identifiably feminine, the balance between the decorative and the horological has been neatly judged. The overall appearance chimes in neatly with the brand's art deco heritage and, rather like its designer, the Idéale is chic without being self-consciously gimmicky; at home wherever worn.

### Rebirth

When Deleskiewicz joined the company in 1988 however, the business founded in 1833 by Antoine LeCoultre was in a very different state. The Reverso was a long-forgotten design; a relic of the art deco

The outrageously decorated 'Ruby Rock Setting' Reverso (£213,950), unveiled last year.

years; its relevance to the present awaiting rediscovery. Even the circular innovation watches of the 1950s - the crownless Futurematic, the alarm-equipped Memovox, the shock/water/magnetism-resistant Geophysic, et al. - were little more than a memory. The brand identity was almost destroyed.

"The company was bad," says Deleskiewicz unapologetically. "They made a lot of different things for other brands: pens for Christian Dior; movements for Vacheron Constantin, Patek Philippe, Audemars Piguet, Cartier... They forgot to develop their own brand, losing a lot of energy and money working for others. But then we started to rebuild the brand with Mr Belmont and Mr Blümlein."

Deleskiewicz started work as a designer. Typical of Jaeger's new-wave design was the Grand Reveil of 1989. Although some aspects of the case design now look slightly dated, this watch set out Jaeger-LeCoultre's stall as a serious and uncompromising maker of complicated watches. After all, a perpetual calendar with moonphase and alarm was quite a leap from making pens for Christian Dior. The Grand Reveil was Jaeger's wake-up call to the world of *haute horlogerie*.

After this strong debut, the early 1990s saw Deleskiewicz working on the new Reverso, which must rank as one of the great success stories of the last decade, seeing Jaeger-LeCoultre consolidate its reputation as a serious watchmaker. As the company grew, so did Deleskiewicz's role - from Designer to Chief Designer, overseeing all visual aspects of the brand.

### Social evolution

One of the things that makes Deleskiewicz so valuable to Jaeger is his experience outside the Vallée: he has perspective. "I make the drawings of the watches, find the concept and discuss it with the markets and clients to find out what the customer wants." And if this sounds riskily close to world focus groups and a slavish adherence to market research, Deleskiewicz is quick to dispel that thought. "This is nothing when Alfred Chavot designed the Reverso in 1931. That was in direct answer to those who wanted to protect the glass."

It is difficult to fault this argument. For Deleskiewicz, what he calls "the social evolution of people" is of paramount importance. His goal is to balance the requirements of an ever-evolving public with the creativity of the manufacture. The Reverso was quite plainly a solution to a problem encountered by those customers who played polo



Janek Deleskiewicz, Creative Director of Jaeger, bringing perspective to a closeted industry.

and indeed the wristwatch was born out of a similar response to client demand.

A similar attitude pervades the Idéale range. Its bracelet design, whilst inarguably chic, also reflects the needs of the modern girl about town, dashing between engagements and adapting to erratic dress codes. Deleskiewicz is rightly proud of the Idéale's one technological gimmick pandering to the social butterfly: "We have a quick-release system which allows anybody to change the strap in two seconds without the help of a watchmaker. The lady who is wearing Idéale can swap the colour of the strap to match the colour of her outfit in no time." After all, as the smoothly animated quotes on the Jaeger website profess, "it is a watch to be worn every day. It was definitely not designed to remain hidden away in a safe box."

It was also according to Deleskiewicz's theory of social evolution that "with Mr Belmont [long-serving CEO of

Jaeger-LeCoultre before the arrival of Lambert] we started work on an eight-day movement. It is not by chance that we decided to do this. People work all the week and during the weekend they take off their watches [perhaps to don a more rugged Reverso Gran' Sport] and on Monday morning they get ready for a new week and wind their watches. The eight-day is a function for the weekly way of life."

### Retaining the spirit

"I think that the imagination of people like Antoine LeCoultre or Breguet is like that of da Vinci." And just as da Vinci's dreams of flight and submarine travel have only recently been realised, so "with new tools we can make watches that people were only dreaming of in the past. For example, the difference in quality between the old and new Reverso is totally different. The spirit was in the old watches but the quality was not. Now the watches are much better but with the same spirit."

Yellow-gold Idéale with mother-of-pearl dial (JLC846 calibre, £9,700; JLC608 calibre, £9,150). A camel leather strap is also available with the yellow-gold case.



"For me, my years at Jaeger-LeCoultre have been a real university. Sometimes it was hard and tough but I am very happy and proud to present all the new watches."

With the Idéale, Deleskiewicz drew inspiration from Jaeger's ladies' lines from the past, including the 1930s' famous Duoplan. As with the Reverso, a prominent art deco vein runs through the Idéale, which probably goes some way to explaining how these watches look and feel so very 'Jaeger'. "The four distinctive 'claws' [each set with 6 diamonds] and unique metal bracelet are very distinctive," says Deleskiewicz. "Inspired by art deco drawings. They are very fluid and look like little waves. The shape is very 'Jaeger' and easy to identify too. It is a big watch, covering the full width of an average lady's wrist. But at the same time, the thin strap/bracelet gives a very feminine look. In today's trend for big ladies' watches, Idéale is following the trend in a very *avant-garde* way, mixing the size with refinement."

### Learning curve

Despite the acceptance that people, and therefore the watches they wear, are getting bigger, he also feels quite strongly that simply putting a smallish movement into a larger case is, in a way, a betrayal of the customer's trust and also an underestimation of the discriminatory powers of an increasingly informed consumer.

This is just one of the lessons that he has learned during his time at Jaeger-LeCoultre. "For me, my years at Jaeger-LeCoultre have been a real university. Sometimes it was hard and tough but I am very happy and proud to present all the new watches." Despite his plain devotion to the brand however, there is one thing he would never do. "I can live in London, New York or Paris but never in the Vallée de Joux. Only half-time, not full-time!" ◉

The legendary Reverso was given a new lease of life from the early 1990s, shortly after Deleskiewicz joined Jaeger. This variant, the Grande GMT (£6,650) was launched at last year's Geneva fair.

Further information: Jaeger-LeCoultre, Tel: 0800 587 3420, [www.jaeger-lecoultre.com](http://www.jaeger-lecoultre.com)

