

What Lies Beneath



Hedi Slimane lends horological weight to his new watch range for Dior Homme

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Having met Hedi Slimane, red-hot Artistic Director for Dior Homme since 2000, I understand fashion even less. I am totally confused as to whether Slimane's chosen ensemble was trendy, ironic or simply the result of random selection carried out in an unlit bedroom; I remain baffled by his female assistant's 'mullet' hairdo, of the type favoured by motorcycle speedway fans of the 1970s. No matter it seems: Slimane has disallowed such flighty chic pervading his new Chiffre Rouge watch range, which – contrary to cynical expectations – takes a surprisingly serious approach to 'real' watchmaking.

As I followed the mulleted assistant into the lift *en route* to Claridge's Suite 102, I was desperately trying to rid my mind of a suggestion put to me by one of the Dior PR girls back down in the foyer: "Ooh! You must ask Hedi about his new cologne creation as well!" Cologne? What was she talking about? I was here to discuss what was supposed to be Dior's first 'serious' watch – not to enter into the finer points of the designer's perfume collection.

But they are like that, these fashion designers: after a good job on a pair of swimming trunks, they think they can design anything – shoes, sunglasses, aftershave, bathrooms, you name it. Of course, after that lot, a wrist-watch is a doddle.

So it was with some scepticism that I entered 102 and shook hands with the surprisingly reserved Slimane. My first question was along the lines of: "So, buddy, what do you know about watches which makes you qualified to design one, then? Tell me that!" I could see the beastly cologne on the sideboard.

"Well," replied Slimane carefully, "I sort of grew up with watches really. I used to spend a lot of time with my uncle, Gabriel Tortella. He co-founded Geneva's Galerie d'horlogerie which became Antiquorum, but I don't like to make too much of the association." I mentally genuflected before the designer, begged forgiveness for my earlier thoughts and reluctantly conceded to myself that he

(Left) The flagship model of the three Chiffre Rouge watches: the Irreductible (£6,250). Just 300 of these will be made, half with black dials and half with grey dials. Hedi Slimane's signature palette of black, white, grey and the eponymous red is used to great visual effect with all three models.



(Above) Zenith's El Primero movement is visible through the Irreductible's sapphire caseback – a feature of all three Chiffre Rouge models. Here, the winding rotor is engraved with the 'Irreductible' name. (Centre) The standard chronograph, the Chiffre Rouge A02, uses an ETA 2894 calibre movement (£1,885). Like the Irreductible, the A02 features a tinted crystal on grey dial version and three totally different pushpieces. (Right) The entry-level model is the simple Chiffre Rouge A03, which uses the ETA 2824 automatic movement (£1,075).



obviously did know more than a bit about watches after all. I began to listen a little more attentively...

"Having said that, I don't have a collection of watches because I don't have a feeling for collecting. When you spend your life designing, you can't have too much around you, because it clutters-up your vision. The two watches I have, however, I love: the first is the Omega Speedmaster given to me when I was born (1968) and the second is my Rolex Bubbleback. But now, of course, I wear one of the watches I have designed myself." Those are the 'Chiffre Rouge', or 'red date' watches you see pictured here.

To me, there is definite appeal in the telltale 'signatures' that Slimane has incorporated. He is known for his asymmetrical style, hence the asymmetrical case and quarter-knurled bezel. His favoured colours are white, black, grey and red – all of which appear around the watch. It might sound like a dog's dinner, but in reality it works.

"Chiffre Rouge has been an integral part of the Dior Homme project since the beginning. But it has taken all of three years to develop, because what I wanted was a 'real' watch; something properly made and not just a gimmicky item with nothing more than the name of the fashion house going for it. I had already

realised that the fashion label might actually put some people off, so I knew from the outset that we couldn't use quartz movements or fancy bracelets."

The flagship of the range is the limited edition 'Irreductible' chronograph. Thanks to mother company LVMH's ownership of Zenith, it uses a version of the legendary El Primero movement, specially developed for Dior. The most eye-catching piece of styling on the Irreductible and the standard chronograph in the range, the A02 (based on the ETA 2894 calibre) is the use of three totally different pushpieces.

"The reset button is made from red-coloured porcelain. I like to use that colour to break harmony and create a sense of urgency," explained Slimane. "The guilloché used on the crown is a signature pattern I have used in other areas of the Dior Homme range and the rectangular chronograph button maintains that slight irregularity, like that of a control panel."

Looking at the finished products, one is disinclined to dispute anything that might reek of fashionista jargon – Dior's new range clearly retains enough horological integrity to justify it. My only regret after meeting Slimane is that I did not sniff his new cologne. If it is half as good as his watches, it probably smells rather good... ○