

Non- Pareil

Keeping the promise is the secret of FP Journe's matchless reputation

James Gurney



François-Paul Journe has achieved an enviable state of affairs during his career as a watchmaker; he heads a small and manageable workforce that produces small series of watches that go a long way towards satisfying the demand of Journe's followers. Despite the modest scale of the operation, FP Journe still manages to make large waves within the industry, being near-universally acknowledged as one of the most capable Master Watchmakers, as well as one of the most astute.



Restoration is the fast-track for watchmakers wishing to strike out on their own, as it develops a highly practical ability to solve mechanical conundrums.

Unlike so many of his peers, there is no question of FP Journe's name being separated from the work he produces, nor of his identity being subsumed into a parent company – an occurrence that is all too common in the industry (witness the current turmoil at Franck Muller, or the salutary example of Daniel Roth).

Shoulders of giants

Journe's background does, however, share several key elements with the antecedents of his contemporaries; not least an extensive exposure to the work of the great Master Watchmakers of the past such as Breguet, Janvier and Berthoud. He graduated from *l'Ecole d'horlogerie*, Paris in 1976 and quickly became immersed in restoration work at his uncle's shop in Paris. Restoration is the fast-track for watchmakers wishing to strike out on their own, as it develops both a highly practical ability to solve mechanical conundrums (just how does this part work?) and a familiarity with the techniques and skills of the

original maker. It is no surprise to learn that modern luminaries from George Daniels to Michel Parmigiani all proved themselves at this most demanding of finishing schools.

Familiarity with works of the past tends not, in this discipline at least, to breed contempt; rather respect – the desire to emulate and, in the most determined, surpass the achievements of the past. It is by no means an easy or guaranteed route. Nevertheless, six years after he started at his uncle's workshop, Journe had gained enough experience and time to complete his first tourbillon watch.

Working with restoration pieces is also, as FP Journe's success demonstrates, an education in the particularities of the market. The nature of the work means that, from the beginning, Journe has been exposed to clients who are both knowledgeable and precise in their needs. Again this has been a learning process common to peers as diverse as Michel Parmigiani and Franck Muller. What sets Journe apart is that he also seems to have looked at the ways in which his horological heroes of past centuries have been perceived by



This Tourbillon Souverain variation has a leather strap, 18 ct. red-gold dial and platinum case (SFr. 141,250).



their clients and the world in general. The combination of these strands has resulted in a unique approach to the question that continues to dog so many aspirants: how to make the transition from watchmaker to watch manufacturer?

'Invenit et fecit'

FP Journe the brand came to fruition following some astute thinking on Journe's behalf. Once he had established his credentials among the more alert and demanding of watch collectors through a series of one-off projects (not the least the *Sympathie* clock he made for John Asprey in 1987), Journe began gaining experience in the more industrial side of watch design; something that eventually led to him setting up a fully fledged movement-design business.

He was also careful to ensure that each stage of the brand's development funded the next. For this he borrowed from Breguet the idea of using subscriptions to fund his first series, thus allowing Journe to maintain control of the project in hand – a preoccupation that he has sensibly upheld to this day. Importantly, this also means he can deliver on the commitment implied in the motto accompanying everything carrying his name – *invenit et fecit* (literally, 'invented and made'). Journe sees this as a promise to his clients that ultimate responsibility for the design, construction and finish of FP Journe watches rests in his hands. This promise is particularly important because the scale of the enterprise means that many of the components have to be made by other companies, but always to specifications set

(Left) This platinum bracelet Tourbillon Souverain (SFr. 173,455) is also available with red-gold case and bracelet (SFr. 152,110).

(Right) A profile view of the Tourbillon Souverain (10 mm depth).



(Top) François-Paul Journe at the workbench, and (above, second left) receiving the special Jury award for the Octa Calendrier at 2002's Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève. In 2003, the Octa Lune was awarded the men's watch category.

by FP Journe. He even persuaded Nivarox to custom-make hair-springs for his production, though apparently these are now used by other brands.

Tourbillon Souverain

The distance covered by Montres Journe SA since the company's establishment in 1999 is illustrated by the launch of the second tourbillon series to be produced under the FP Journe name. The first, the Tourbillon Souverain with remontoir, of which some 300 were made, has been withdrawn – a popular move among those collectors who already own one, further exemplifying Journe's acute understanding of his market.

The remontoir mechanism, which equalises the delivery of energy to the escapement, has been something of an obsession for Journe, and it took many years to reduce the dimensions to suit a wristwatch movement. The new Tourbillon Souverain (SFr.141,250–SFr.173,455) adds 'seconde morte' ('dead seconds') to the equation – a rare and interesting touch that again owes much to Journe's fascination with the work of his forebears. The dead seconds element, also known as 'independent seconds', is linked to the remontoir and has the effect of making the seconds hand jump second by second, just as it would in a quartz watch. To say that dead seconds is an addition is a little misleading however, as very few of the components were transferred direct from the first tourbillon – the only exception apparently being the tourbillon cage.

True one-off

On the face of it, FP Journe's watches are clearly a unique mix of style and substance. Complex and novel movements are presented in a manner that recalls his past heroes without ever being slavish. The detail of the construction is equally impressive and includes the use of gold bridges – a surprisingly rare phenomenon – and a variety of finishes that derive from both French and Swiss traditions of horology. Perhaps the one aspect of greatest individuality is the design process: rather than designing a movement then creating a dial to display its functions, Journe starts with the dial and designs the movement to match – although obviously within the constraints of the possible!

Rather than design a dial to display the movement's functions, Journe starts with the dial and designs the movement to match – within the constraints of the possible, of course!



(Left) The Octa Divine – the first model from FP Journe to be set with diamonds and feature centre hour and minute hands (SFr.62,180). It is also available without diamonds (SFr.42,544). (Right) FP Journe's Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève prize-winning Octa Lune. This variation has a platinum case and yellow-gold dial (SFr.30,800, excl. tax).

While the design of the watches may or may not appeal, there is no doubt as to their worth, particularly while the company is still small enough to be happy with an annual production of about 800 pieces. If the Tourbillon Souverain is out of your reach, then there is a collection of slightly more affordable watches known as the Octa, after their eight-day automatic movements

(SFr.26,400–SFr.30,800). Conversely, if you really cannot live with the idea of having a watch that is part of a series, then Journe is still interested in one-off projects both as exercises in their own right and as test-beds for future collections. Be warned though: anything that came up for sale at auction would almost certainly command six-figure prices. ●

Further information: William and Son, 10 Mount Street, London W1K 2TY.
Tel: 020 7493 8385, Fax: 020 7493 8386, E-mail: info@williamandson.com,
www.williamandson.com, www.fpjourn.com