




Once Upon a Time in Italy

In case you didn't know, Florence is more than a one-brand town

Ken Kessler

 There is an ever-so-tiny sigh of resignation if you mention the "P" word around Anonimo's Federico Massacesi. It is as if he is used to the comparisons, the likening of his timepieces to Panerai's huge – and hugely successful – diving watches. But he is gracious, too. "Panerai have called attention to the noble art of Florentine watchmaking, helping in its revival. And Anonimo are very much a part of that as well."

Too much evidence almost obscures the differences: both brands are based in Florence (although Panerai are now based in Milan), both use massive cases for all their models, both have developed novel methods of locking their winding crowns, both sport highly legible dials and both profess to safety at depths more in keeping with Nemo's *Nautilus*. Massacesi also notes that Buti and some other newish Italian brands suffer the same inferences, but there is the wonderfully Italian shrug accompanying the explanation, oozing with *menefreghismo* – the art of not really giving a damn.

Making a difference

When Massacesi *does* bristle slightly at a suggestion that Anonimo – founded in 1997 – are a clone, he is quick to point out that Anonimo's specialties include case design and manufacture, that the company holds a couple of exclusive patents, and that his watchmakers were part of the network of Florentine craftsmen that supplied components to Panerai in the pre-Richemont Group days.

More importantly, Massacesi is too polite to remind people that, back in 1997, the Panerai revival was only just starting, and that there was no indication whatsoever it would become so influential a make. Which means that, if you maintain that Panerai did inspire Anonimo, either Massacesi was a brave gambler, or he had access to a crystal ball.

Even in choosing the company's name, which is readily identified in a number of languages as meaning "no name", Massacesi demonstrated that he wanted the watches to "speak for themselves". He also refers to Sergio Leone's magnificent film creation (*Il Mio nome é Nessuno* – "my name is Nobody", the dark character portrayed by Clint Eastwood in the spaghetti westerns), noting the wry humour of a brand that is, literally, called "No Name". More importantly, he is happy that collectors already refer to his watches not as Anonimos but by model nomenclature, as Millemetris or Militares or Wayfarers. To Massacesi, this is a form of respect and recognition shown only

to legendary watches, the classics that are known by a brandless shorthand: Reverso, Daytona, Calatrava, Explorer, Mk XI. The knowledgeable enthusiast does not have to be told the manufacturer's name.

Values

It seems that every one of Massacesi's decisions has been made with a deliberation beyond that of merely choosing what will tempt a watch fancier. He spent 8 years at the fashion house Salvatore Ferragamo, serving for five of them as the Assistant Managing Director. One area in which he gained experience was that of fine shoes, and – by extension – fine leathers. And this would prove useful for Anonimo.

Among the matters that concern him most, Massacesi cites added value. He is not interested in absurd complications – Anonimo, so far, have drawn the line at chronographs and dual-time as far as "extras" go – while chronometer certification "doesn't add real value." He lists prestige brands that do not seem to be bothered with it, either. Instead, he is content to have his watchmakers, led by Fabiano Alessi, adjust and regulate Anonimo's various movements to standards in excess of their

competitors. Massacesi also considers the extra *finissage* and fine-tuning to represent real value. "And our special locking mechanism costs a fortune, equal to the rest of the case."

As collectors and cognoscenti continue to polarise into two groups – those who only respect *manufacture* brands and those who have no problem with brands that buy in and modify movements – Massacesi likes to stress that "the case is as important as the movement, especially with sport watches." Here, both the design and the execution combine to create a failure-proof housing for whatever movement the maker employs. He is not exaggerating the true status of the case, which is just as well since all of Anonimo's are hand-made and -finished, usually in batches of 200–250 and always with a minimum production run of 125. All of Anonimo's watches feature round dials, but the majority of the models position the round face in a slightly cushion-shaped case. Each possesses a heft and a finish that is confidence-inspiring, but Anonimo go a step further with the Militare and Militare

The Professionale is Anonimo's new diver's watch, boasting several specially designed features, including a unique mechanism for securing the bezel. With its conspicuous colour scheme and hefty 46.4 mm size, this is not a watch that can easily be ignored.





(From left) The Militaire Crono, the Millemetri, the Wayfarer, the Three Glasses and, far right, the Professionale.

Crono. This pair, the latter being Anonimo's best-selling model, employ the first of Anonimo's unique selling points: the aforementioned locking mechanism.

Installed between the lower lugs is a hinged segment to which the strap is attached. On the watches with this fitment the winding crown is positioned at 6 o'clock; when the hinged piece is locked into place it presses down on the winder, creating a perfect seal. Simple but very effective.

Anonimo's other unique feature is the strap itself, the company having patented a treatment they call "the Kodiak Process", a by-product of Massacesi's experience with Ferragamo. It is a treatment for the leather that works down to a microscopic level. The resultant product is a strap impervious to water – not simply water-repellent but able to suffer long-term immersion with no effect – that remains supple and comfortable.

Massacesi and Alessi chose their movements with care, because Anonimo watches are

unashamedly sport models that are expected to operate without failure in the toughest conditions. Among the choices, all modified to Anonimo's requirements, are the well-tried Uitas 6497-1 for use in the Militaire and the Three Glasses, ETA's 2824 automatic movement for the Millemetri, the Valjoux 7750 for the Cronoscopie, and the ETA 2892 with Dubois Depraz module for the Militaire Crono, the latter said to be a unique application.

Reaching out

Anonimo's credibility has been further enhanced by a number of collaborations with sporting bodies, not least the Cooperativa Nazionale Subacquei (CNS), the scuba diving organisation. CNS provided the research data for the design of the company's latest offering, the Professionale. This massive timepiece – 46.4 mm across, 54.3 mm long and 15.7 mm thick – is secure down to 2 atm. It features an extra-thick dial and extra-thick domed sapphire crystal, its special case is made from sand-blasted AISI 316 Plus stainless steel and there is a special screw-down

locking mechanism for the crown. It also features a helium expulsion valve to compensate for the build-up of internal pressure due to extended working at great depths, and boasts a special mechanism to secure the bezel. This piece, destined to join other diving watches such as the Doxa 300 and the Rolex Sea-Dweller – as well as a cluster of Panerai – as a future classic, is being produced in a severely limited run of only 250.

QP, defeated by Florentine traffic in the late afternoon, was able to visit the company's *atelier* on the outskirts of Florence just in time to see CAD/CAM experts Antonio Abuchi and Stefano Pierrone closing shop for the day. A quick examination of the riches held within the PCs before they were shut down revealed some tempting future details, but, at present, the company is concerned with satisfying the demand for the

Professionale and the Militaire Crono. Up to a half-dozen watchmakers occupy the *atelier*, and we were there just in time to speak with Fabiano Alessi, who was working late on a batch of Professionales. What was evident is that Alessi is as obsessive about watches as Massacesi is.

Massacesi is clearly proud of his baby, unconcerned about his illustrious neighbour and happy to inform you that Anonimo are already "climbing the charts" in both collectors' affections and in the auctions. Wisely, his first foreign venture was establishing the brand in the USA – a country in love with both large watches and Italian style – so Anonimo will, sooner rather than later, be seen to have their own identity. And Massacesi will be even happier when collectors think of Anonimo and Panerai as having little more in common than Italian style. ◉

Further information: Anonimo, 14–16 Corn Market, Halifax, West Yorkshire HX1 1TH.
Tel: 01422 355 304 or 01422 352 445