



New Name, Old Hand

QP introduces Pierre Kunz,
a veteran of watchmaking

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When taking in the hilltop view afforded by Franck Muller's Watchland Park, one simply cannot miss the picturesque and charming Swiss residence located in the distance towards the shore of Lake Geneva. Painted in the same slightly undercooked, poached-salmon pink as Watchland's own buildings, elegant letters across the front proudly announce the workshop of Pierre Kunz.

A watchmaker and designer of many years standing, Kunz officially launched his own brand to much acclaim during the 2002 WPHH (World Presentation of Haute Horlogerie) show, quickly establishing a unique look and appeal across a broad range of models – a remarkable achievement that usually requires many years of hard work. The collection covers watches with hours, minutes and seconds, to chronographs, minute repeaters and tourbillons in various configurations and combinations. Indeed, when visiting the workshop and viewing the collection, one could not be blamed for mistakenly assuming that his shop had already been in existence for several years. Not only is the collection large, well thought out and unified by design concept, the workshop and showroom areas exude a comfortably familiar, worn-in atmosphere of unbroken continuity, with the deeply waxed parquet flooring and stucco ornaments adding a sense of maturity to the young brand.

In the present horological climate of conglomerates and takeovers, it is important to note that more is shared between Kunz and Muller than merely the colour of their respective buildings. The Kunz workshop can be seen as the latest addition to Muller's expanding "horological galaxy", whose object is to bring together those of like mind and spirit in a counter reaction to the

small number of large multinational groups now dominating this most Swiss of industries through economic takeovers. Being part of the Watchland Park phenomenon is to enter into a kind of intimate symbiotic process between professionals, a practise not typical of the watch industry elsewhere in Switzerland.

"For me it was just fantastic to be able to come here and concentrate on the creation of the kinds of wristwatches I always dreamed of, within an inspirational environment. I didn't have to think twice when Franck Muller offered me the chance to set up my workshop here."

Muller's decision to invite Kunz to become an associate of Watchland Park was wise. Born in Bern in 1959, Kunz's career already includes more than 20 years in the industry. As a young student fresh from the school of watchmaking in the *Vallée de Joux*, his talent was quickly noted and he was set to work in the complications department of Patek Philippe, where he remained for 5 years. This was followed by work at various brands such as Lemania, Blancpain and Gerald Genta, providing him with a broad overview of different markets in the industry.

Working within Watchland Park is not just inspirational; it also provides a bit of security and

stability in these interesting times. There is a very practical side to being neighbours, including the bundling of purchases for parts, which is more economical for everyone, and the ability to tap into a vast knowledge base as well.

"At Watchland Park I can work independently, but still have the benefits of working within a larger context. When a particular supplier requires that I must purchase a minimum of so many thousand pieces when I only need 100, it's very handy indeed."

And according to Kunz, working as a watchmaker in total isolation is also not everything it is cracked up to be, despite all the romantic imagery involved: "It's true, solitude is absolutely necessary for developing ideas. But after ideas comes realization, and it's really rewarding to get together as we do regularly to discuss projects and concepts, exchange input and experiences as colleagues instead of as competitors in the same market. Our styles are different, yet complementary. And there's a lot of mutual respect between all the people here, which is very inspirational."

Character

Kunz has a style all of his own, with almost limitless variations created through the flexible use of several basic visual elements. The cases all have fairly wide satinized bezels, Breguet-style "coin-finished" serrated sides and forceful lugs that complement the bezel. Retrograde functions in all permutations and combinations abound, usually partnered by a sun-ray-patterned background. Indeed, his personal fascination with retrograde functions forms the fundamental element of his visual design and watch-making flair.

The dial of every watch from his shop is striking in appearance. Although all Pierre Kunz watches are available in both white and black, the black versions are by far the most visually impressive, offering stylish contrast with subdials or silver chapter-style outer rings. The predominate use of Roman numerals in combination with these visual (and mechanical!) choices lends each of his creations a highly classical air with a bold, modern



tint. It also makes them instantly recognisable – a very important aspect for the release of a new brand within an already crowded marketplace. This forceful visual character is also accentuated by the use of a large, 42-mm diameter case size for his collection. Admittedly, the dial contrasts beautifully with the red-gold, white-gold or platinum cases. (Regular yellow gold is also available, but you will not see it in the catalogue pictures; contrast is the key here.) But the real reason for this basic size decision is that Kunz has made retrograde functions uniquely his own, and the larger-than-standard diameter allows him the greatest freedom to experiment with the combinations of different retrograde functions and still retain legibility.

Pierre Kunz's 002 STR is bold both in terms of visual design and mechanical engineering. It is extremely tempting to spend a few minutes just watching the seconds move through each of the three retrograde dials.





The 402 SDRL chronograph features a traditional subdial, two retrograde subdials and a moon-phase indicator, yet manages to be supremely legible and looks uncluttered.

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Perhaps egged on by the creative atmosphere of Watchland and Franck Muller's fearless forays into outrageous yet fascinating design experiments, or possibly just bold by nature, Kunz continues to experiment, and after the brand's launch in 2002, his new watches for 2003 show that he is not afraid to go over the top or attempt a new approach. One new model that raised eyebrows was his 002 STR, a square watch with triple-retrograde seconds. The feeling of anticipation whilst waiting for the seconds to jump through each fan-shaped retrograde segment is unusual to say the least.

The end result of all this hyperactivity is reminiscent of a kind of wrist-sized kinetic sculpture, and might be seen by some as too much of a good thing. But it is admittedly quite fun to see, and will definitely make its owner the talk of the dining table.

Over the past few years we have all become used to the big-date phenomenon, whereby the date is actually the largest and most readable number on the entire dial. With his new 005 HMRD, Kunz has gone a step further and made the date even more important – he has replaced the hours ring with a date ring, and placed retrograde hours and minutes symmetrically in the middle axis of the dial face. The whole is a typical Kunz symbiosis of the classical and modern. If you were to own this watch long enough, you would probably learn to read the time just from the visual clues the hands create without even needing to read the exact hour. On this watch, 6:30 pm is represented by both hands pointing to the centre of the watch face.

Another unusual creation is the chronograph 402 SDRL. Here, retrograde date and seconds are combined with a traditional minutes counter at 12 o'clock and a moon-phase indicator. This model is offered in a 44-mm diameter size not only in keeping with today's fashion for large chronographs, but additionally offering better legibility in connection with the dial space used by the retrograde functions and the additional outer minute ring.

Maybe I am just a fuddy duddy, but I personally still hope he will create a watch with a diameter of 38 mm. Getting a watch of 42 mm in size to look convincing on my wrist would require my becoming a fervent epicurean and gaining more weight, or, in a healthier vein, training for hours with weights. But whatever your personal taste might be, it is hats off to Pierre Kunz, who seems to have done the impossible in the twinkling of an eye with real panache. If this is just the beginning, then the 2004 WPHH show has definite surprises in store. ●

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