

TO THE MAX

MAX BÜSSER IS SHAKING THE FOUNDATIONS OF HIGH HOROLOGY WITH HIS SCI-FI DESIGNS AND RADICAL TECHNOLOGY, WRITES NORMAN BURNS.



Two words sum up Max Büsser's foray into haute horology – game changing. Incredible, considering Max never had any intention of entering the watchmaking world until a chance meeting led him to the position of product manager for the highly regarded Jaeger-LeCoultre. But today Max Büsser's (almost) eponymous MB&F (Max Büsser and Friends) brand is producing some of the most avant-garde timepieces ever conceived.

What makes MB&F unique is the fact it's a design co-operative involving scores of artisans, engineers and developers, who all collaborate to craft the limited edition pieces. Set up in 2005, in six years MB&F has launched iconic pieces such as the HM1 (Horological Machine), Thunderbolt, HM3 Frog and ReBél onto the luxury market, blowing away watch fans (and what is a mainly conservative industry) with 3-D creations that blend retro-science fiction with rock star swagger (think Jules Verne on a Timothy Leary acid trip).

"At MB&F we clearly can say that we are Rebels – in thinking, in attitude, in creativity. That is one of the most important characteristics, which not only empowers us, but also keeps our community of Friends together," says Max.

Not that MB&F's timepieces are for everyone. Price tags can stretch upwards of \$200,000, but that's the way Max, who once aspired to design cars, likes it.

"Without this community of creators, artisans and engineers, my ideas would remain just that – ideas," he says.

"From the designer to the engineers and developers, and of course all the incredible artisans who craft every single part of a 370-part movement or 100-plus part case, all the people involved are crucial.

"The 20th Century has brought to us the concept of marketing and communications, which means that all brands try to create products which are client-centric. At MB&F we are creative-centric... the most important people for us are those who actually craft the pieces. They transform our dreams into reality – and that's what counts the most," he affirms.



And what dreams. The Thunderbolt's twin-cylinder design, for example, echoes the Space Age 60s and Max's childhood love of aviation. Every part of its 311-piece mechanical 'engine' (designed in conjunction with Les Artisans Horologers) had to be made from scratch. The left dial displays the power reserve, the right features the hours and minutes, and the machine – it's impossible to call it a mere watch – is powered by two parallel mainspring barrels.

Then there's the bug-eyed HM3 Frog. Renowned product designer Eric Giroud was the 'Friend' involved in this piece and writes of his involvement: "When Max first shared his new product idea with me, I thought he was mad. Now, as I consider creative madness one of the most appealing illnesses, of which I also suffer, I immediately accepted to be part of this extraordinary adventure." The time on this masterpiece is ingeniously displayed on two independently rotating domes (the frog 'eyes'), with power disseminated from a battle-axe shaped automatic rotor.

As Chief Creative Officer of his own brand, Max also gets to live the dream – albeit at the end of a very timely and methodical process.

"The creative process is always the same. I transform my nutty ideas with designer Eric Giroud and my

business partner Chief Technical Officer Serge Kriknoff into 3-D designs and stereolithography moulds.

"From there we approach the movement and case engineers who, after a certain amount of months, come back to us with what they can or cannot achieve – and usually suggestions to replace what cannot be done.

"From there we redesign the piece to fit the technical specs and then develop in parallel on movement and casing; it takes about 18 months from thereupon to craft two or three prototypes which are thoroughly tested and then five pre-series which are also tested. Approximately three years after the initial designs, the first piece can be delivered to the customer."

Max names the Thunderbolt as, to date, the most technically challenging MB&F creation but clearly isn't about to rest on his – or his Friends' – laurels. As long as there are horological boundaries to be broken, MB&F will be there.

"I definitely hope there will NEVER be an 'ultimate' timepiece for me – because that would mean I will have no more reasons to create. It would be the end of the road," he says.