

INTERNATIONAL WATCH



Celebrating our 20th Year

MB&F

BÜSSER'S CREATIVE LAB






The HM3 Frog is available in Grade 5 titanium with blued rotor or a limited edition of 12 featuring black-coated titanium with green rotor.

BY IAN SKELLERN

**MB&F** celebrates its fifth anniversary intent on maintaining the distinctive vision of its founder

# BÜSSER'S Creative Lab



In 2005, after seven years at Jaeger-LeCoultre and seven years at Harry Winston, where he introduced the trailblazing Opus series, Maximilian Büsser had no intention of continuing to do the same old thing with a new name on the dial. He had no interest in mere evolution.

So when he launched MB&F (Maximilian Büsser & Friends) in July of that year, his vision was not to have his own watch brand and not even to start a dynamic, cutting-edge brand. Instead he wanted a true creative horological laboratory.

The watchmaking world was somewhat divided initially by MB&F's first timepiece, Horological Machine No.1. As Büsser expected, there was shock and awe alongside the praise. However, as the myriad tombstones of one-hit-wonder-and-gone brands testify, it takes more than a great idea and an interesting first watch to create a lasting brand, let alone a revolution. It takes much more.

Fast-forward five years to 2010. Any doubts professed by naysayers have been swept aside by a procession of MB&F's radical three-dimensional Horological Machines, each further away from comfort zones than the last.



MB&F's Machines are not designed by committee



### Number One

Delivered in 2007, HM1 (Horological Machine No.1) introduced the MB&F concepts of three-dimensional architectural horology. HM2 (2008) and HM3 (2009) were inspired by science fiction. "Star Wars" was the movie that most influenced the young Büsser, and it shows. The upcoming HM4, to be released this month, has an aeronautical theme and is also inspired by childhood associations.

A common thread running through all of MB&F's creations is a sense of true enjoyment. Büsser set out to create an environment where he could work with people he respected to inspire that usually lost-in-adulthood children's sense of awe in making new discoveries. "At MB&F we take our timepieces very seriously, not ourselves," says Büsser.

HM1 was the Machine that broke the mold. To a world raised on round movements in round cases, the sheer three-dimensional volume of the modular case and the dual dials on multiple levels and the figure-eight movement with a tourbillon was not just a shock, to many HM1 was an affront.

HM1-Black, a limited edition of ten pieces



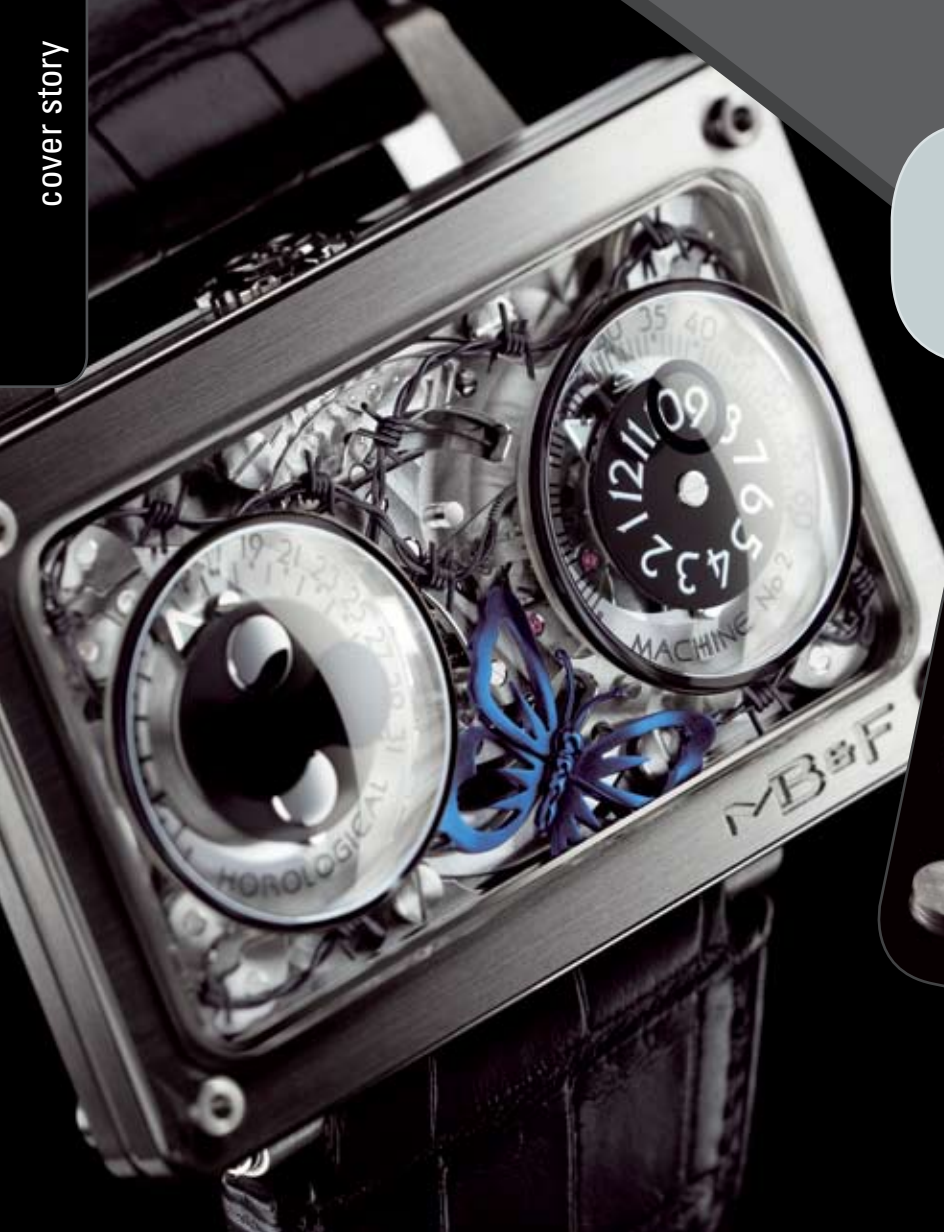
HM2 with ceramic top plate and red gold



Horological Machine No.1 featured hours and minutes on separate dials, a raised central one-minute tourbillon, a seven-day power reserve from four massive mainspring barrels, and both automatic and manual winding. It took 376 components and 81 functional jewels to realize the movement's radical design and construction. The case alone consisted of 48 parts. While the original HM1 was available in white or red gold, limited editions in black and titanium completed the collection. Only 100 HM1 movements were made over three years, ensuring its exclusivity.

### HM2

If anybody thought that HM1 provided a clue to Büsser's direction with MB&F, Horological Machine No.2, while clearly recognizably MB&F, was as shockingly original



Featuring flying buttresses, portholes as dials and a sliding crown guard, HM2 and its movement (below) challenged conventions. Artist Sage Vaughn put his stamp on the design with his version for the Only Watch auction in 2009 (left).



as the first machine. Featuring flying buttresses, portholes as dials and a sliding crown guard, the case of HM2 was so complex—100-plus components—that it could only be developed with the innovative modularity first seen with HM1, but taken to new heights with HM2.

Each of the two portholes on Horological Machine No.2 offers the viewer time in a different context. Conventional (if the word can ever be used in relation to MB&F) time is indicated in the right-hand porthole by jumping hours and concentric retrograde minutes, while a more laid-back approach to time is seen in the left porthole by means of a retrograde date and bi-hemisphere moon phase.

### Only Watch

The artistic side of MB&F was highlighted by the collaboration with American artist Sage Vaughn for the 2009 Only Watch charity auction. Vaughn, whose work often illustrates the emotional tension between life's beauty and its desperation, imagined an HM2 with a bright butterfly trapped by barbed wire. That unique piece was realized with the butterfly in blued-gold and the wire in black gold.

The artistic collaborations continued with Alain Silberstein and resulted in the Bauhaus-looking HM2.2 Black Box. This model showed the benefits and possibilities of MB&F's modular approach to case

construction and Büsser's willingness to allow artists to use his Machines as their canvas.

"With Sage and Alain the co-creations were relatively easy to develop because I was seeking their input to enrich my own creative world. Basically I gave them free rein," he says.

### Sapphire with a twist

Early 2010 saw the launch of the sensational HM2-SV (Sapphire Vision), a limited edition of just twenty-five pieces featuring a completely transparent sapphire top plate with electric blue highlights. Here, the incredibly high level of fine movement finishing and decoration was put on display to spectacular effect.



Sapphire 4-Titanium  
Case ref: 20.DST  
Limited Edition  
25 pieces

MB&F  
Horological Machine No.2

HM2-SV (Sapphire Vision) is a limited edition of twenty-five pieces featuring a completely transparent sapphire top plate with electric blue highlights.

**HM3**

Horological Machine No.3 left no doubt that MB&F was not just out of the ballpark, but also out of the galaxy. The press release for HM3 began, "Warning! Horological Machine No.3 (HM3) is so far outside existing timekeeping references that it may cause sensory overload." It might have also warned off those with a weak heart or a preference for the comfort of traditional timekeepers.

With its winding rotor and oscillating balance on top of the movement instead of underneath and with twin indication cones (available in two configurations: Sidewinder and Starcruiser), HM3 pushed both the technical and aesthetic limits of



**HM3**

The Frog differs substantially from HM3 in that it is the aluminum domes that rotate under the sapphire crystals rather than hands around stationary cones.



HM4, with this Thunderbolt movement inside, will debut this month

horological architecture and design.

With the movement upside down, two high-tech ceramic bearings efficiently drive the time indications on the cones, one showing hours and date/night, the other minutes. An over-sized date wheel that is actually larger in diameter than the movement itself provides high legibility.

### Frog a-courting

HM3 looked as wild as anything to ever grace a wrist. However, the recent launch of HM3 Frog has actually made HM3 look tame. The Frog differs substantially from HM3 in that it is the aluminum domes that rotate under the sapphire crystals in the Frog, whereas it is the hour and minute hands that rotate around their respective stationary cones on HM3.

The Frog's unusual method of indicating time required the development of a new gear train for the HM3 engine. This was because the aluminum hour dome of the Frog rotates in twelve hours compared to the twenty-four-hour revolution of the HM3 hour hand. And as the oversized date wheel is driven from the hours, the gearing driving the date also had to be reworked.

"The Frog makes me smile each time I look at it," admits Büsser. "It has a very mischievous attitude to it."

### This year's model

It is difficult to know if Büsser's intention in releasing images of the HM4 movement before the actual watch was to allow full appreciation of the unusual caliber before it is hidden

by the case, or to give our minds a chance to partially prepare before our perception of reality is brutally swept asunder yet again.

With his firm, Büsser feels he has given birth to a new artistic approach to classical watchmaking in which the Machine is unleashed from its traditional role as a time-keeper and is freed to run with unbridled imagination.

"I am not at all the same man I was five years ago," he says. "I feel stronger, more daring, and I am happier to get out of my comfort zone."

From the evolution of MB&F's Horological Machines to date, it appears that the only thing predictable about HM4 is that it will propel MB&F even further into space, where there are no competitors. ☺