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THE **MB&F** THUNDERBOLT Horological Sculpture

Special Report:
Watches and Motorsports



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Hot Watch Trends
As Seen in Basel

Interview:
Patek Philippe's
Thierry Stern

FR&GS REBELS



Max Büsser makes new friends while his designs continue to shun convention

By Michael Thompson

As friends of Max Büsser recently noted, the newly discovered tiny Costa Rican tree frog that is considered the rarest frog on earth now has a hard-bodied cousin that is probably even more difficult to find: the HM3 Frog Zr, a just-released zirconium edition of Büsser's HM3 Frog.

With its bulging eyes, last year's HM3 Frog evolved from the 2009 HM3 and leaped to the top of the must-have list for many collectors worldwide, particularly those who have followed Büsser's very personal Horological Machine journey since he founded MB&F in 2005. Though only twelve individuals could own the limited edition green-rotor version of that watch, the ongoing blue-rotor model may still be found—but don't count on it, and don't look in Costa Rica.

Earlier this year MB&F made a third Frog, which appeared somewhat edible with a chocolate-hued titanium case and rich red gold rotor. It arrives this month in a limited edition of ten just in time to celebrate the Purists.com tenth anniversary, for which it was made.



HM3 Frog Zr SPECIFICATIONS

Movement: Three-dimensional horological engine designed by Jean-Marc Wiederrecht/Agenhor and powered by a Girard-Perregaux base, balance oscillating at 28,800 bph, purple 22-karat rose gold battle-axe shaped 'mystery' automatic winding rotor, hour and minutes transmitted via ceramic ball bearings to rotating domes, thirty-six functional jewels, 304 components

Functions: Hour on one dome (aluminium dome rotating in 12 hours), minutes on second dome (aluminium dome rotating in 60 minutes), date around the movement

Case: Zirconium; limited edition of 18 pieces, screwed-down crown, dimensions (exclusive of crown and lugs): 47mm x 50mm x 16mm, 53 case components

Sapphire crystals: Domes and both display backs with anti-reflective treatment on both faces.

Dials: Rotating aluminium domes, stationary hands

Strap & Buckle: Black hand-stitched alligator strap with white gold & titanium custom-designed deployant buckle

For the newest version, the HM3 Frog Zr, Büsler and Friends have re-cased the playful high-end amphibian in zirconium, a metal primarily used to forge jet engine blades and for nuclear reactors. When layered with yttrium oxide, this metal can handle very high temperatures, which is why this combination is also used on space vehicles to

assist in their resistance to heat during atmospheric re-entry.

The hard and exotic Frog Zr exterior is punctuated of course by its two bulbous domes, the Frog's eyes, which can out-stare even the most smitten owner. Eyeing the domes, he or she will enjoy checking the hours and minutes, which are displayed via the rotating aluminum

domes situated under those amphibian sapphire lenses.

ALTERNATE REALITIES

Telling time is only part of the enjoyment of wearing an MB&F piece on the wrist. With each debut, from Horological Machine No. 1 to the 2010 Thunderbolt (seen on this month's cover) to



“THERE IS NO WAY WE CAN CREATE OUR AMAZING MACHINES BY WANTING TO PLEASE”

this newest member of the Frog family, Büsler's vision alters how one views hours, minutes, seconds, days and the whole idea of wearing time on the wrist.

Even within the Horological Machine families Büsler and his team vary how one can read the time. The HM3 Frog, for instance, features the aforementioned rotating aluminum domes under the clear sapphire domes. This display reverses the method used with the original, non-amphibious HM3, which showed time with red hour and minute hands rotating around stationary truncated cones.

This change required a completely different gearing system because the dome used in the Frog rotates in twelve hours, whereas the HM3 hour hand features a twenty-four hour rotation. And since the oversized date wheel is driven from the hours wheel, the date gear also had to be remade.

Crafting the sapphire domes is also a painstaking process. The slightest imperfection in the sapphire would introduce a disconcerting point of magnification. Other case details include clover-head screws, and engraved arrow indicating the large-sized date and a display back revealing the dual ceramic bearings that drive the domes. The movement inside this case was designed by Jean-Marc Wiederrecht and is powered by a Girard-Perregaux caliber base.



The Chocolate HM3 Frog, with a bronze-hued titanium case and rich red gold rotor, arrives this month in a limited edition of ten just in time to celebrate the Purists.com tenth anniversary, for which it was made.

Like the gold case, many visible movement components in the HM3 Rebel are plated black. The rotor is 22-karat gold.

“THERE ARE THOSE WHO PREFER TO NOT BOW TO CONVENTION, WHATEVER THE COST”

Finally, if the sapphire domes don't require all your attention, perhaps the purple 22-karat gold rotor will. According to Büsser, when it rotates quickly, and under just the right type of light, the battle-axe-shaped weight reflects “hints of green and yellow.”

WRIST REBELS

Before it became a Frog, the original HM3 Sidewinder worked best on the left wrist, even with its already unorthodox crown and dial configuration. Yet, there are those who prefer to not bow to convention, whatever the cost.

“Eighteen months ago, I had dinner in Singapore with a remarkable gentleman, an owner of many of our pieces, and he was wearing his HM3 Sidewinder on the right wrist—hence not able to read the time at all,” reports Büsser.

“When I asked him why he did that, he answered that for him it was more important to wear his watch on the right than to read the time! I was puzzled. And realized thereafter that not only were MB&F owners rebels in their own way (you need to be pretty courageous and self-asserted to wear our creations) but when they were left-handers, hence wearing their watch on the right wrist, and they took that rebellion to another level.”

Büsser, who knows something about rebellion, took that collector's very deliberate response to heart—and then brought it to his watchmaking team. They soon gave birth to the HM3 Rebel, which Büsser debuted at the recent BaselWorld.

The Rebel is a blackened HM3 Sidewinder turned to fit the right wrist. It's the same three-dimensional HM3,

but with several critical changes, not the least of which is the black plating.

“The case is machined differently, the dials have a different geometry (shape and placing) and each visible part of the movement is coated with a special black plating—thin enough not to alter dimensions, but strong enough to actually be metallic black,” explains Büsser. “We chose to keep a white gold case, because the PVD treatment does not “kill” the finish on it. Very often black watches are drab and matte. The Rebel's finish is rich, luscious and metallic.”

Instead of just flipping the Sidewinder to fit the other wrist, Büsser says he gave the watch its own personality, with added charisma. Eighteen rebels worldwide can own this limited edition.

“All MB&F owners are rebels in their own way,” adds Büsser.

“Every client of ours I have met is very self-asserted and has maybe gone through the show-off phase but is now completely out of it—they want to own and wear a work of art which speaks to them and do not care if it speaks to others. Which is a very interesting twist, as when we create we do not care if people will like what we do—there is no way we can create our amazing machines by wanting to please.”

HM4 THUNDERBOLT

As we noted last September, Laurent Besse, Béranger Reynard, and Patrick Lété of Les Artisans Horlogers, a small high-end movement firm based in Le Locle, Switzerland, created the very unusual movement that essentially defines this 2010 piece. Almost all of the 311 components were manufactured especially for use here and all the parts are produced in three small Swiss factories.

But that case! It just might be the most complex case in the history of horology, and it's made using quite a lot of titanium and sapphire. It takes 150 hours of machining and polishing just for the central sapphire case, according to Büsser. Add to that the more than sixty hours of machining and finishing for just the titanium caseback, and you can understand



Stephen Hallock, MB&F NORTH AMERICA

An active collector and financial consultant, Stephen Hallock started MB&F NA three years ago to handle the brand's activities in the United States and Mexico. We asked him a few questions about watches, trends and retailers. You can read more from Hallock at his website ticktocking.com.

As a collector, are there other new brands you've recently seen that have impressed you?

They are not new brands, but I love URWERK and De Bethune. URWERK was a pioneer in the world of contemporary horology and continues to make incredible pieces. De Bethune is making classic watches with a modern twist and modern production techniques. The quality of some of their pieces is staggeringly incredible. I also love the Hourglass by Ikepod and designed by Marc Newson. It is a true piece of art. The Devon Tread 1 is a new watch with a completely new approach, built in the United States by people in the aerospace industry. While the watch is not mechanical and not as refined as others, I like the outside-the-box-thinking and I look forward to seeing what else they have up their sleeves.

In the United States, do you feel you've reached all the retailers you need?

We currently have three retailers in the United States, spread out on the coasts. Eventually we will have closer to six. As with everything at MB&F, we choose our partners very carefully and make decisions always in the long-run best interest of the company. I would love to have dealers everywhere so as many fans as possible can actually handle the watches, but unfortunately for a company of our size and production (152 pieces last year) it is simply impossible.

Are there any trends in watchmaking you feel are unneeded? Alternately, any trends you see that you wholeheartedly agree with any would like to see more of?

I am drawn to pure concepts: companies and products with a clear reason of existence. The brands I mentioned before all have that. They are helmed by true creators trying to express a love for horological art in whichever manner strikes them at the core.

I find many brands lack that soul and are merely copying what someone else already does better, be it classical pieces that merely rehash what has been done for a hundred years or seemingly more avant-garde watches that, when you really think about them, offer little to no horological or artistic value.

why the Thunderbolt was probably the Friends' greatest technical challenge.

The watch is a tribute to aviation, he notes, “because from the age of eight to twelve or thirteen I spent every free minute crafting model airplanes... They were everywhere in my room. Hanging from the ceilings, accumulating on the shelves, in the cupboards. I would spend hours assembling, modifying, painting anything which had two wings. HM4 is a very personal interpretation of what

would happen if you crossed a piece of ultra high end horology with the world of aeronautics.”

Unlike any jet, however, the engine here is in plain sight, clearly visible through the extensive sapphire windows along the top, bottom and sides of the sculptured case. The balance highlights the top view, while the time (right pod) and power reserve (left pod) are immediately evident and do not require the wearer to flick his or her wrist.

The HM4 Thunderbolt, winner of best concept/design watch award at the 2010 Geneva Grand Prix. Its unusual movement is pictured below, left.



The HM4 Thunderbolt essentially updates the idea of the always-visible asymmetric driver's watch, delivering it directly into the space age.

SCULPTURE?

The watch can be polarizing. Is it sculpture or horology? As the company warned in a press release for HM3, MB&F's ideas are not for the faint of heart and definitely not geared to appeal to those who prefer classic timepieces that require viewing the time in traditional dial-on-top configurations. The warning seems particularly appropriate for this jet-engine-shaped time machine.

Büsser and his friends make watches they want to wear, and if you are among those who share their fantastical tastes, their brand is for you.

Later this year Büsser will release two new models, each with new designs. One will be the second MB&F Only Watch edition, which will join dozens of other models specifically designed for a charity auction at the Monaco Yacht show this September 22. All the proceeds from Only Watch go to support research into Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy.

The previous MB&F Only Watch model presented an artistic edition of the HM2 in which artist Sage Vaughn wove blackened gold barbed wire through the movement and then added a blued gold butterfly, which cannot escape.

"June will see the unveiling of our amazing Only Watch piece-unique co-created with a brilliant Chinese artist, then September will see the new Machine, and finally, if we have any energy left, you will see a creation in November which should make more than a few people smile—and others cringe."

Can't wait Max. ⌚



NEWEST FRIEND: Charris Yadigaroglou

Maximillian Büsser & Friends recently appointed Charris Yadigaroglou as Global Head of Communication, where he will, yes, head the firm's communication, trade marketing, public relations and community management. Charris has focused his entire professional life on marketing and communications, both on the agency side—he managed the Swiss operations of Grey Advertising for over ten years—and within in-house marketing departments as communications manager for Piaget and also as a vice president of marketing at the Kempinski hotel chain.

"I am thrilled to work for MB&F," said Charris. "MB&F's horological machines ignore any form of market research, and the company's success is not based on superficial marketing tactics; they are the result of an independent, authentic, uncompromising creative spirit. The brand's followers clearly adhere to that spirit."