



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.



MB&F's Machines are not designed by committee

Büsser's Creative Lab

By Ian Skellern

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

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.

Transparency

When Büsser forged the concept of "Friends" it was with the intention of transparently recognizing all of those people essential to realizing his horological dreams. These included watchmakers, designers, craftsmen, retail partners, customers and aficionados. Büsser was under no illusion that the architectural kinetic art he was creating would be widely appreciated by the masses. In fact, he was fully aware that by uncompromisingly making exactly what he wanted, with no concession to what might be termed marketable, the vast majority of collectors would not "get it."

And that was OK with him. But it soon became apparent that while Büsser was forging his own path through the horological jungle, ever-increasing numbers of people appreciated or were curious to understand what he was doing.

Nobody knows the destination, probably not even Büsser.

MB&F evolves as he does. However, the trip is an exciting experience in itself, as more and more converts are happy to discover.

"Creativity is not a democratic process. I listen to many exceptional people, sometimes taking their views into account, sometimes not, but the final decision is mine alone. MB&F's Machines are not designed by committee."

Büsser wanted MB&F to bring out a completely new Horological Machine each year. It was quite an ambitious undertaking when you consider that both the movement and case architecture of each Machine are not only completely new, but also unlike anything that has existed before. There are no references with MB&F.

It is to Büsser's credit that this year MB&F will have delivered its fourth completely original Horological Machine in as many years, plus different variations of the machines, many of which are amazing stand-alone pieces in their own right.

Number One

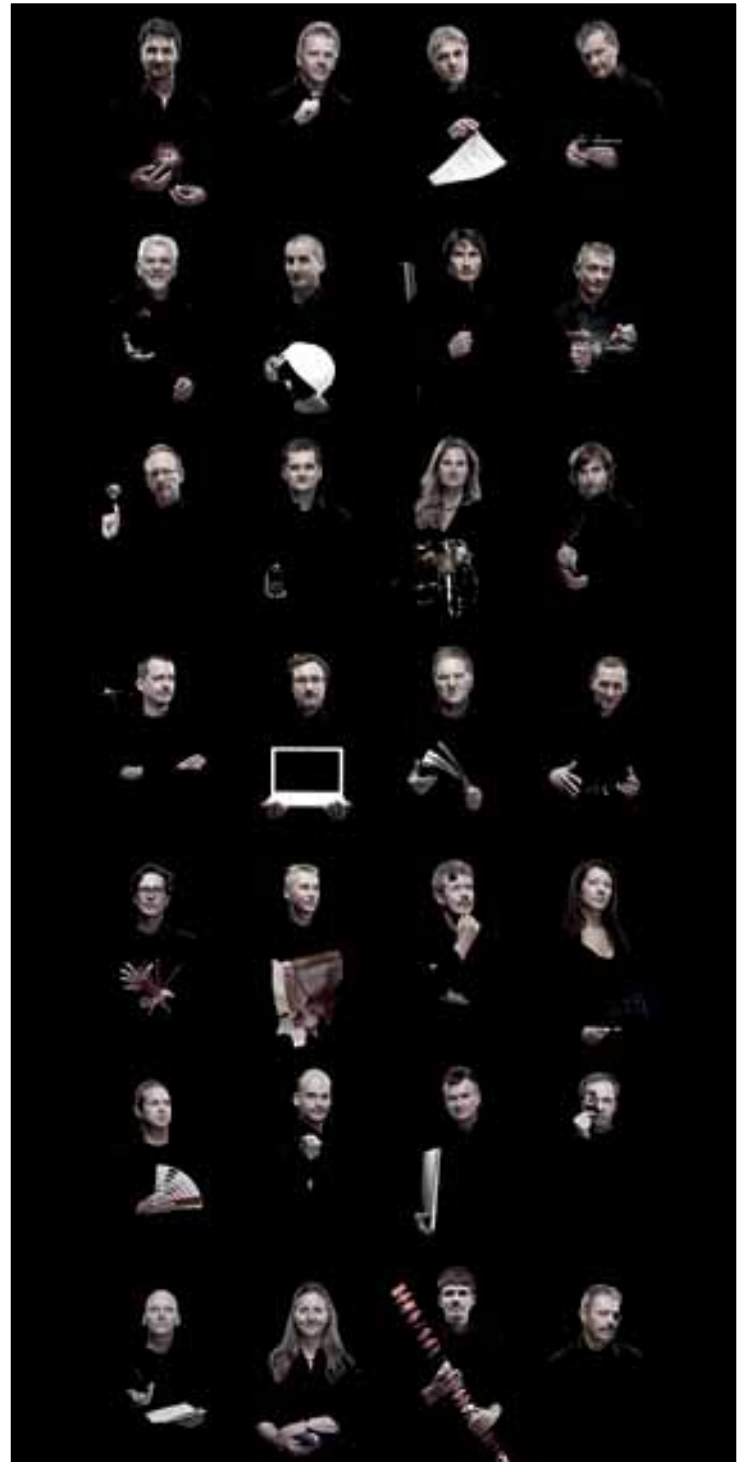
Delivered in 2007, HM1 (Horological Machine No.1) introduced the MB&F concepts of three-dimensional architectural horology. HM2 (2008) and HM3 (2009) were inspired by science fiction. "Star Wars" was the movie that most influenced the young Büsser, and it shows. The upcoming HM4, to be released this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



HM1-Black, a limited edition of ten pieces



The F Word

The "F" in MB&F means Friends. Büsser's concept is to be open about all those who have collaborated on each Horological Machine project and to actively publish their names and roles in each press release.

The Friends have thus far included great watchmakers and designers like Laurent Besse, Peter Speake-Marin, Jean-Marc Wiederrecht and Eric Giroud, who were involved in the development of each Machine. The whole concept of Friends has resonated even more strongly as social media has taken off. The MB&F Facebook page is one of the most dynamic and all-inclusive of any watch brand. In addition, MB&F was the first haute horlogerie brand to publish a general interest blog (called A Parallel 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 HMI was an affront.

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 HMI was available in white or red gold, limited editions in black and titanium completed the collection. Only 100 HMI movements were made over three years, ensuring its exclusivity.

HM2

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



HM2 with ceramic top plate and red gold



challenged conventions. Artist Sage Vaughn put his stamp on the design with his version for the Only Watch auction in 2009.



Featuring flying buttresses, portholes as dials and a sliding crown guard, HM2 and its movement.

Only Watch

The artistic side of MB&F was highlighted by the collaboration with American artist Sage Vaughn for the 2009 OnlyWatch 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.



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

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.

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 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 oversized date wheel that is actually larger in diameter than the movement itself provides high legibility.



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

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 timekeeper 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.