



## Artists in Collaboration

MAX BÜSSER AND HIS LATEST "FRIEND", ALAIN SILBERSTEIN, JOIN CREATIVE FORCES WITH THE MB&F HM2.2 WATCH

**M**AX BÜSSER LOOKS SLIGHTLY taken aback. I've just labelled him the rock star of the watchmaking world – this is a guy who states simply, "Because it's cool," when asked why he does what he does with his brand MB&F (Max Büsser & Friends) and its Horological Machines. "Yes!" his friend Alain Silberstein declares. "Yes, you are the rock star, the rebel!" "We have the original rebel here," Büsser counters, referring to Silberstein. Laughter ensues.

Büsser, one of the most affable personalities in Swiss watchmaking, admits to something of a diva's attitude driving his brand. "It's for selfish reasons: creating something I believe in. If someone else likes my machines, that's great, but I do it purely for personal pleasure." Horological hedonism, in other words.

HM2.2 is a surprise to anyone familiar with Silberstein's own line of whimsical, colourful watches. Other than the three multicolour shapes putting his visual signature to this watch, there are only subtle red accents to the smooth, monochromatic case, hence its moniker, Black Box.

We tune in to Max Büsser and his latest "Friend," Silberstein on this unexpected pairing.

**SINGAPORE TATLER:** *How did this collaboration come about?*

**MAX BÜSSER:** We met in Singapore three years ago at Tempus [the fine watch exhibition organised by The Hour Glass], got along well, and he was one of the first people whom I wanted to work with on one of my pieces. Alain didn't know it, but I'd been a fan for 18 years before. Every year at Basel I'd run to his booth to see what's new, and he'd put a smile on my face every time. He has his own style and is extremely innovative. About 10 or 15 years ago, when watchmaking was so conservative and no one dared to get out of line of doing a Patek-lookalike, this man had his own imaginary life that was essentially about connecting with the child within. That's something I recognise in Alain's creations; for me, MB&F is about re-tapping into the kid I was.

**ALAIN SILBERSTEIN:** An artist is someone who is faithful to himself. There is no marketing – I hate marketing – and Max, he was himself, never hiding his passion for robots and toys. Since I was also producing toys for more than 20 years, a certain fellowship attracted me to him. When he asked me to design a new version of HM2, I instantly said yes. My wife told me it was a mistake, because it's a huge challenge to find another

*“My wife said it was a huge challenge to find another story to tell when the design is already perfect, but I’m an artist who loves a challenge”*

story to tell when the design is already perfect. But I’m an artist who loves a challenge.

**ST:** What was the first thing you wanted to change?

**AS:** Nothing. That was the problem! Max worked with a very talented designer, Eric Giroud, on HM2, and I wanted to respect their design. I’m an architect, so my approach is like making a roof to house the movement, which is the same for my own watches.

**ST:** Where’s the Alain Silberstein design flamboyance in HM2.2?

**AS:** When I’m designing a new product, the name leads the design. “Black Box” came naturally. The black box is a place where I keep all my secrets. I say there’s a rainbow of colours inside, but you can’t open it and see it! I don’t think it’s too radical – there’s a symphony of black and different materials, surfaces and finishing. There’s the Grendizer rotor, the matte surface of titanium with silicium coating for the case [the same treated material for all Alain Silberstein watch cases], and the glossy finish of the sapphire crystal. The inlaid ceramic line in red is the paraph – like the final flourish of a signature – that enhances the blackness of the box.

**ST:** Alain, you say you don’t like marketing. Why?

**AS:** Marketing puts people into boxes with

categories, it reduces the richness of humankind. I’m not trying to make the watch of the world; I’m designing something unique that may attract some individuals. We’re trying to please ourselves – and I’m sure I’ll find people who’ll love the pleasure I had in designing this watch.

**MB:** It’s about creating what I believe in, even knowing that not many will wear it. That’s why we’ll always be small and do very few pieces. For 2009, we made only 40 HM2 movements, eight of which will be taken by HM2.2 Black Box. That means I’m doing eight each of five different cases – red gold, white gold, black ceramic red gold, black ceramic titanium and HM2.2.

**ST:** Actually, HM2.2 looks rather like a piece of individually-wrapped chocolate; like a promise of something within ...

**AS:** A watch is a promise of something within. Measuring time is an intimate thing, and you want something bespoke and unique for your own use. And when you say it’s a promise, it’s an open design – which is exactly what I’m looking for in all my years of creations. HM2 is an MB&F watch, and I had to respect the MB&F DNA and aesthetics within Max’s work. HM2.2 is my creation, but it is open to interpretation by other people. If a watch is not a promise, there is no reason to design watches!

**ST:** Alain, will you take something away from this collaboration that you’ll incorporate into your own line?

**AS:** Alain Silberstein watches represent my own universe which I share with my wife, so I’m not sure there is space for others. Collaborating with Max was a challenge. It was the first time another entrepreneur asked me to perform something different. Frankly, I’d love to do that – another brand, another style. And only eight people will share the joy we had creating HM2.2. ■



#### HEAD-TURNER

Inspired by the black box, Alain Silberstein’s HM2.2 is a symphony of black and different materials, surfaces and finishing