Lettres

DU BRASSUS

JB 1735

BLANCPAIN

MANUFACTURE DE HAUTE HORLOGERIE

ISSUE 10

DEAR FELLOW WATCH CONNOISSEURS

Welcome To Issue 10!

We have many things to celebrate in our end-of-the-year issue.

This is the first occasion when we are able to speak to you about Blancpain's sponsorship of the National Geographic Society's Pristine Seas Expeditions. We are proud to be part of the Society's efforts to explore, study, and preserve some of the increasingly rare, and sadly at times threatened, remaining wild places on earth.

There is no more eloquent explanation of this vital work than the article and photos in this issue's story on the Sala y Gómez expedition.

We also are proud to be able to celebrate one of our own achievements. We spotlight in this issue the astonishing engraving talent of Marie-Laure Tarbouriech who practices her art in our Le Brassus Farmhouse workshop. This past year, Marie-Laure entered into the prestigious "Un des Meilleurs Ouvriers de France" competition. Talented artisans aspire just to be accepted to compete and only a very select few ever reach the revered plateau of being recognized as the best in their craft, a Meilleur Ouvrier. Not only was Marie-Laure accorded the honor as a Meilleur Ouvrier, she won first place in the competition. By the time you read this, to receive her medal, she will have been welcomed into the Élysée Palace to an award ceremony conducted by Nicolas Sarkozy, the President of France.

There is another "first" in this issue. The wine column of the previous nine issues has ranged widely in its explorations of Burgundy, Bordeaux, the Rhone Valley, Tuscany, and the Napa Valley. We stayed at home this time, to introduce you to the astonishing Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays of Daniel and Martha Gantenbein of Switzerland's Grison region.

I hope you enjoy this Issue 10!

Marc A. Hayek
President and CEO Blancpain

CONTENTS

04

L-EVOLUTION TOURBILLON
A Unique and Logical Placement of Power Reserve

16

CARLO CRISCI
Joyful Cuisine at the Gateway to the Vallée de Joux

32

MARIE-LAURE TARBOURIECH
An Award-Winning Artisan in Metal

COVER
Villeret Grande Décoration

50 **SALA Y GÓMEZ – THE LOST ISLAND**
Pristine Seas Expedition of the National Geographic Society

70 **RÉVEIL**
All the Essentials in a Travel Essential

80 **GANTENBEIN**
Astonishing Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from Switzerland's Grison

CONTENTS

IN TIME **04** | **L-EVOLUTION TOURBILLON**
A Unique and Logical Placement of Power Reserve

ART DE VIVRE **16** | **CARLO CRISCI**
Joyful Cuisine at the Gateway to the Vallée de Joux

CLOSE UP **32** | **MARIE-LAURE TARBOURIECH**
An Award-Winning Artisan in Metal

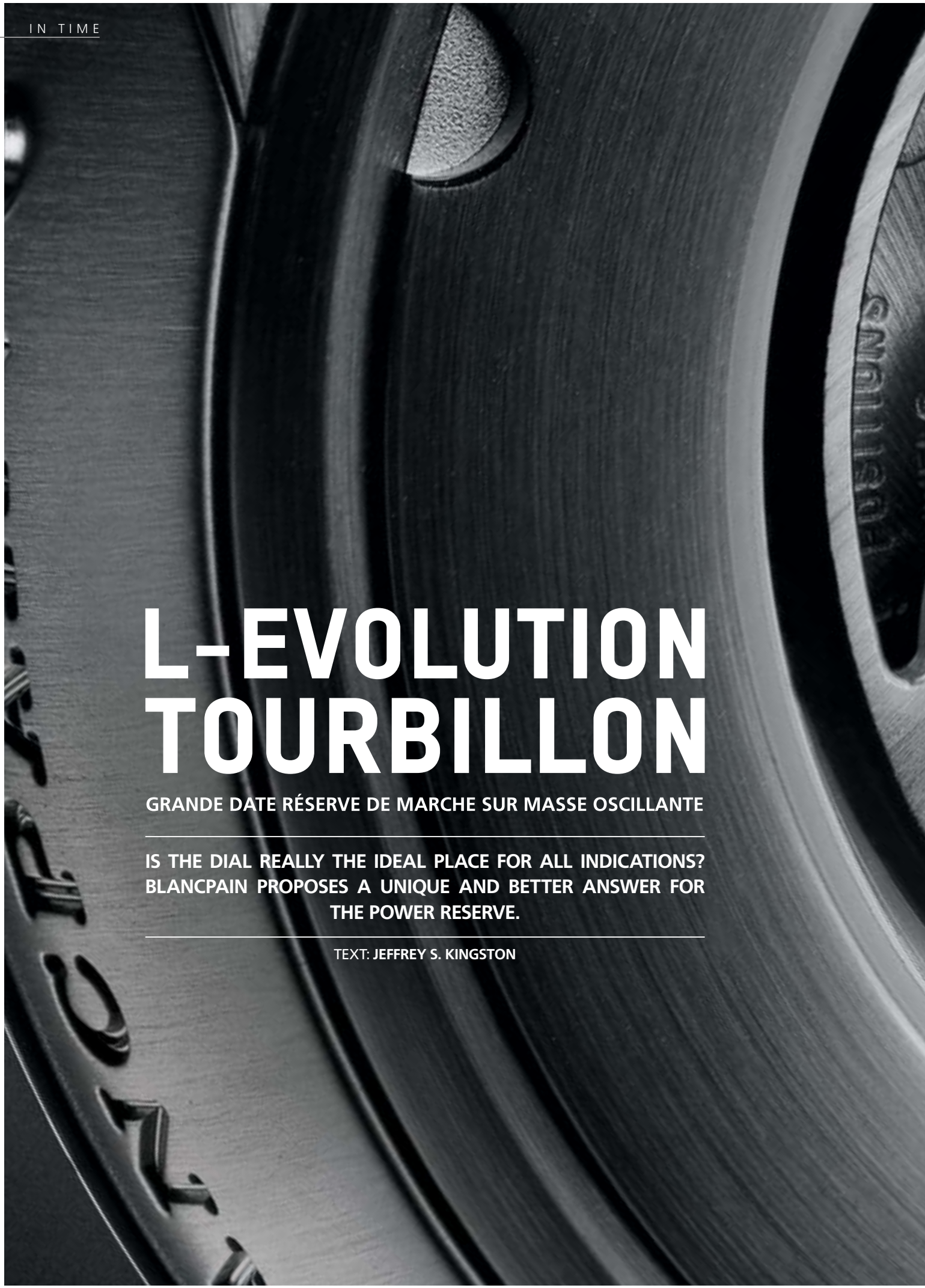
ART DE VIVRE **50** | **SALA Y GÓMEZ – THE LOST ISLAND**
Pristine Seas Expedition of the National Geographic Society

IN TIME **70** | **RÉVEIL**
All the Essentials in a Travel Essential

ART DE VIVRE **80** | **GANTENBEIN**
Astonishing Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from Switzerland's Grison

IN TIME **94** | **VILLERET CHRONOGRAPHE MONO-POUSSOIR QUANTIÈME COMPLET**
Purity of Design in a Complicated Watch

100 | **IMPRINT**



L-EVOLUTION TOURBILLON

GRANDE DATE RÉSERVE DE MARCHE SUR MASSE OSCILLANTE

IS THE DIAL REALLY THE IDEAL PLACE FOR ALL INDICATIONS? BLANCPAIN PROPOSES A UNIQUE AND BETTER ANSWER FOR THE POWER RESERVE.

TEXT: **JEFFREY S. KINGSTON**


7 Jours

MOVING THE POWER-RESERVE INDICATION TO THE WINDING ROTOR BALANCES THE DESIGN OF THE DIAL.

Tradition or logic? Over the nearly three centuries of fine watchmaking, certain design standards, or if you are a business consultant, business practices, have evolved and cemented themselves in place. None more than the placing of all watch indications on the top surface of the dial. Glance at the face and there they are, no matter how many hands or disks it takes to do the job of displaying all of the complications reposing beneath the surface. Traditional, yes. But is it always logical? Certainly for many indications not only is it logical to put the display on the face of the dial, but it would be nonsense to do otherwise. Do you seriously want to mount the case that hour and minute not be immediately readable on the face? In fact, as the exception that teaches the rule, one or two independent watchmakers have produced watches that actually hide the display of time forcing the owner to "do something" to extract hour and minute, or worse, have proposed timepieces that dispense altogether with any hour-minute indication. So consigning these horological aberrations to the trash bins where they deserve to reside, what tradition teaches about watch displays is almost always fully supported by logic.

But not 100% of the time.

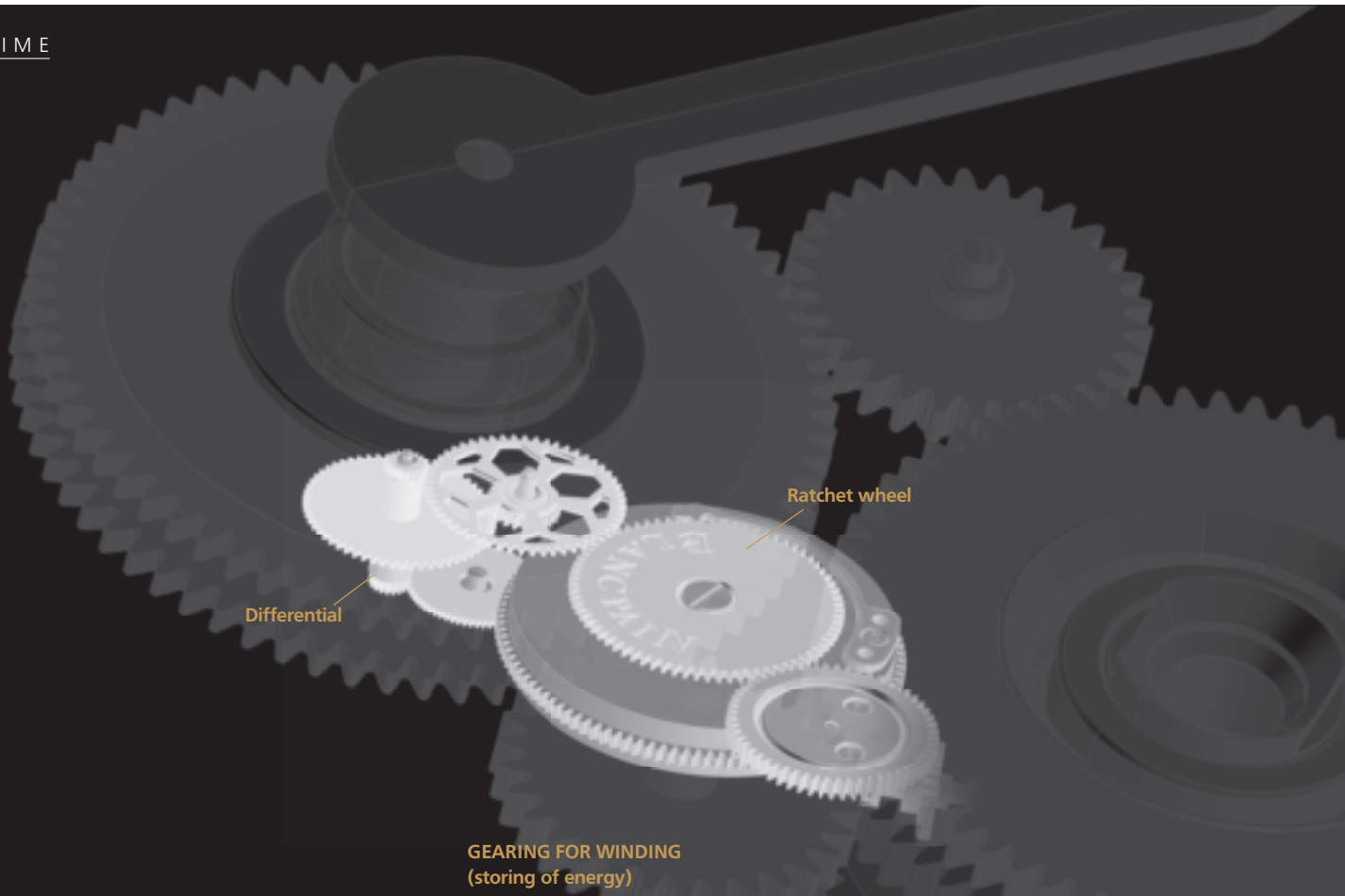

BLANCPAIN
SWISS MADE


7 Jours
BLANCPAIN

ISN'T IT EMINENTLY LOGICAL TO PLACE THE POWER-RESERVE DIAL ON THE COMPONENT THAT WINDS THE WATCH?

Take the power-reserve indication. Without question this is one of fine watchmaking's grand complications. The power-reserve complication shows the degree to which the watch is wound, or said more practically, the amount of wind left in the main spring barrel before the watch will be unwound and stop. Particularly for a timepiece which is not worn every day, it fulfills the vital purpose of informing the owner of the state of wind of the watch and whether there is imminent peril of the watch winding down. But once the watch is strapped onto the wrist, particularly an automatic watch, is there really any purpose of placing the display of the state of wind on the surface of the dial? Logically, all the owner or user requires is for the watch to show whether or not there is a need to take action to wind the watch before putting it on the wrist, at which point the automatic winding mechanism will take over. Similarly, when the watch is taken off the wrist, it is useful and logical to have information on the state of wind to know whether the watch will continue running until the next time when the owner plans to wear it.

With this understanding of how owners will put a power-reserve indication to practical use, does it really make sense, or said another way, is it logical to place the display on the dial? The times when the indications are the most important are when the watch is placed on the wrist and when it is taken off. So while tradition teaches that power-reserve indications are to be placed on the dial, logic points to a different solution. The vital purpose of the complication can be completely fulfilled if the display is on the back of the watch, and if it is placed there then needless complication can be removed from the dial, increasing the readability of all of the other dial-side indications.

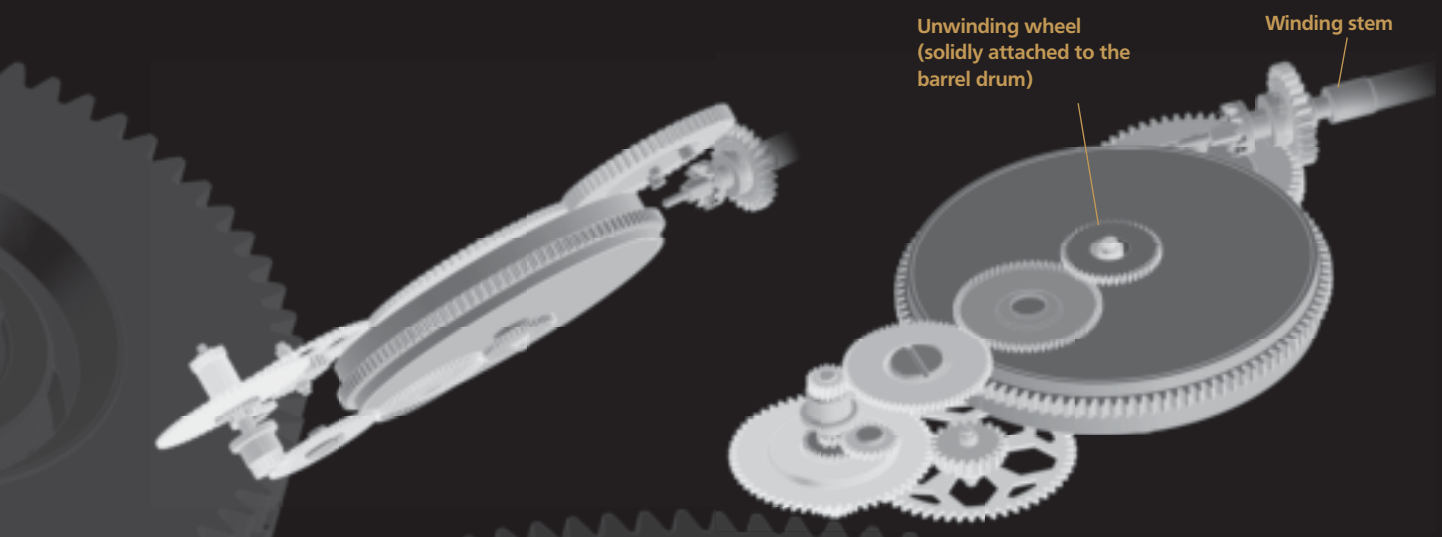


GEARING FOR WINDING
(storing of energy)

This is precisely the thinking that led Blancpain to the design of the L-evolution Tourbillon Grande Date Réserve de Marche sur Masse Oscillante. But Blancpain's analysis did not stop there. As it reasoned that the power reserve should be placed on the back of the timepiece, the designers saw an opportunity to engineer a solution which had never before been achieved. Why not place the power-reserve indicator on a movement element intimately tied to this display, the winding rotor? Of course that is logical; the power reserve shows the state of wind and the winding rotor is the component that performs the winding function.

Much more is involved, however, than mere placement of power-reserve subdial on the winding rotor. Because the winding rotor most decidedly is not fixed in position, oscillating over 360 degrees of rotation, any display placed upon it would be both difficult and annoying to read if its subdial were mounted solidly on the rotor and thus remained in a fixed position relative to the rotor itself. How pleasurable would it be to try and extract the reserve information if the rotor were in an inverted position and carrying an inverted indication with it? Therefore, Blancpain decided early on that the power-reserve subdial would itself have to rotate to keep its dial and hand in a constant vertical position so as to facilitate readability.

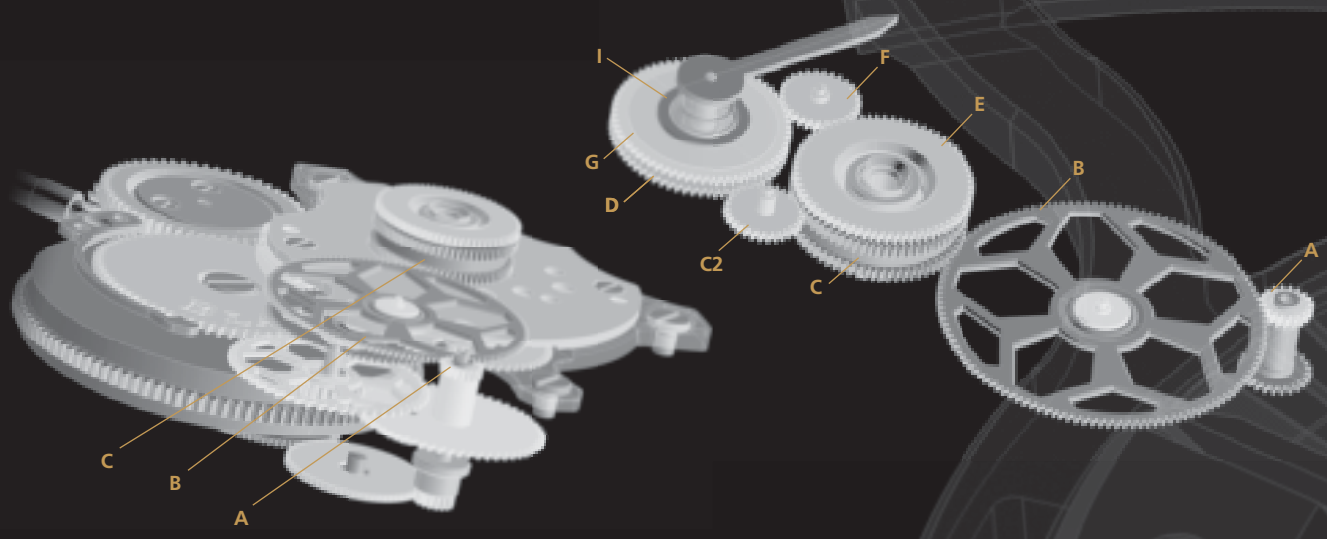
What emerged from this world first placement of the power-reserve hand and dial on the winding rotor was a system far more complex than a traditional display. It is useful to think of Blancpain's innovative system as having four principal elements: i) a differential; ii) the drive gearing for the power-reserve hand; iii) the drive gearing for the dial, and iv) a clutch which operates when the watch is fully wound.



THE DIFFERENTIAL

The winding barrel of a watch, which is typically composed of a drum, a mainspring coiled around a shaft (generally referred to as the "arbor") and a cover, has two principal modes of action: the storing of energy from the winding of the watch and the release of energy to the running train of the watch. For winding, there is a ratchet wheel fixed to the barrel's shaft that is in turn connected to the crown for manual winding and, in the case of a self-winding watch, engaged with the automatic gear train. For the delivery of energy to the running train of the watch, the barrel's drum via a wheel solidly fixed to it is engaged with the running train of the watch that, of course, passes through intermediate wheels to the balance/escapement. The power-reserve system has to be connected to both of these principal components of the barrel, that is the ratchet (for the winding of the barrel) and the barrel (for the running of watch). The reason is obvious: if the power-reserve hand is to display the state of wind of the barrel, it must take into account not only the unwinding of the barrel as it delivers energy to the running of the watch, but as well the winding of the barrel as either the winding rotor or crown rewinds it. If you are mechanically inclined, the description of a system which must combine two different inputs from two gear trains should suggest to you the use of a differential. That is exactly what Blancpain has done, utilize a differential to combine the inputs from the unwinding and winding sides of the mainspring barrel.

Bridge and gear train mounted under the winding rotor.



DRIVE GEARING FOR THE POWER-RESERVE HAND

GEARING FOR THE POWER-RESERVE INDICATION

DRIVE GEARING FOR THE POWER-RESERVE HAND

Attached to the axis of the differential is a pinion. This pinion, **A**, turns both clockwise and counter-clockwise, as the barrel winds or unwinds. Basically, the drive train for the hand serves to transfer the rotation of this pinion **A**, which of course is the power-reserve indication, to a position on the winding rotor. This is done via a train of four gears. Diagram 1 shows this drive train. Pinion **A** is connected to wheel B whose large diameter serves to span across the winding bridge of the watch and to deliver the rotation to the center of the movement. Wheel **B** is connected to a double thick wheel **C** which is located at the center of rotation of the winding rotor. One more wheel is required to reverse the direction of rotation and that is pinion **C2** which is engaged with the second half of the center wheel **C**. The pinion **C2** is engaged with wheel **D**, upon whose axis the power-reserve hand is mounted.

DRIVE GEARING FOR THE POWER-RESERVE DIAL

The object of the dial drive train is to maintain the power-reserve dial in a constant position as the winding rotor which carries it rotates. This is accomplished via a gear train which starts with fixed wheel **E**. As the winding rotor rotates, it carries around with it a pinion, **F**, which is engaged with the fixed wheel. That pinion, **F**, operates as a reverser gear and, in turn, engages wheel **G**, upon which is mounted the power-reserve dial. The result is that, as the winding rotor turns, the power-reserve dial turns in the opposite direction, at the same speed, so as to maintain a constant orientation.There is one additional subtlety associated with the maintenance of a constant orientation of the power-reserve dial. As the winding rotor turns, it is also carrying around with it the wheel **D**, upon which is mounted the power-reserve hand. The rotation of the winding weight, therefore, would cause the hand itself to

turn in an opposite direction as wheel **D** moves relative to wheel **C**, which does not turn with the winding weight. However, even though the power-reserve hand rotates opposite the direction of movement of the winding weight, as the power-reserve dial also rotates in the same direction as the hand, the indication of the hand on the dial will remain unchanged.

THE CLUTCH

There is one additional complication which arises from the mounting of the power-reserve indication on the winding rotor. Blancpain's movement designers had to address the problem of a fully wound barrel for this system that rotates with the winding rotor even when the barrel is full. At full wind, the hand comes up against a stop, which is the rim of an applied marker, **H**, which is mounted on the dial. But as the hand is connected through its gear train to the differential and further as its gear train would continue to rotate with the winding rotor, Blancpain devised a clutch system, **I**, to disconnect the hand and its associated wheel, **D**, from its train when the watch is fully wound. This protects the movement from damage as the hand's gear train would otherwise continue to turn against a system which is fully wound. Not only does the rim of the applied marker, **H**, function as a stop for the hand at full wind, it serves to cover the mounting assembly for the winding rotor creating the illusion of a oscillating weight that is turning in space.

The L-evolution Tourbillon Grande Date Réserve de Marche sur Masse Oscillante is offered in both red-gold and white-gold versions. •

CARLO CRISCI

SWITZERLAND'S EBULLIENT CHEF CARLO CRISCI PRACTICES HIS OWN SPECIAL STYLE OF *NOUVELLE CUISINE*: EXUBERANT, JOYFUL, AND INVENTIVE.

TEXT: **JEFFREY S. KINGSTON**

Many seem to have forgotten what *nouvelle cuisine* was meant to be. When the movement led by Michel Guérard and the Troisgros brothers emerged in the late 1970s, it represented an escape from the rigid dictates of Escoffier, which otherwise served as a set of rules and regulations governing French cooking and opened the doors for innovation and invention. Everyone remembers that part. What seems to have been forgotten is that the movement was thoroughly grounded in classic cooking methods. Yes, it was modern. Yes, it was creative. But it was still recognizable as grand cooking and, most importantly, all of the ingredients were always prepared in a way retaining and preserving their essential character.

Tragically, we live in an age where, cheered on by a cadre of food yahoos, avant-guard restaurants have begun to practice not modern cooking but exercises in food chemistry. Exhibit 1 in evidence: the prominence of Nathan Myrhvold in the movement. His background? Former Chief Technology Officer of Microsoft. *Microsoft? Technology?* The perfect background for re-arranging food molecules as these "food engineers"—note the deliberate avoidance of the word "chef"—are wont to do. The object is less highlighting ingredients for what they are than it is transforming them into something that they were never meant to be. Exhibit 2 in evidence: the emergence of such delights as forest mushrooms placed on inflatable pillows of smoke (oops, my dinner is setting off the fire alarm and isn't this a smoke-free establishment?) or a finish to the meal of liquid nitrogen frozen yuzu which the diner is invited to scrape off a metal cone or a bondage apparatus fashioned out of fruit leather imprisoning dessert bacon (yum). Note to the reader: I didn't make any of this up. Honest. Food engineers in Chicago and Copenhagen dole these out.

Carlo Crisci's restaurant, Le Cerf in Cossonay, refreshingly reminds us of the vital difference between creative modern cooking and food chemistry gone wild. The name of his quaint village of Cossonay should set off small quivers of delight for passionate watch collectors. That is because as one heads north from Lausanne, direction Neuchâtel, the exit for watchmaking's legendary Vallée de Joux, where all three of Blancpain's workshops are located, is marked "Cossonay". It is here, at the portal to the sacred ground of Swiss horology, that Carlo practices his own special style of innovative *nouvelle cuisine*: exuberant, joyful, inventive but at the same time thoughtful and, most important, always thoroughly grounded in precisely applied classical technique. Yes, Carlo takes full advantage of the latest cooking devices—*sous vide,* steam ovens, even nitrogen gas sacks—but never to transform ingredients, always instead to highlight and punctuate their natural character.

Italian by birth, Carlo was not immediately drawn to cooking in his youth. This even though his father owned a rustic Italian restaurant. Instead, his early passions drew him to couture and design. His counseling on whether or not to pursue this early passion turned his choices topsy-turvy. He was advised first to establish a base of cooking know-how as a backup, just in case a career in design did not progress. This "insurance policy" career got off to an early start when at the age of 15 Carlo took a job at the Hôtel du Lac in Vevey. As for design school, it was left in the wake of his "insurance career".

Carlo does not look upon this early period fondly. It was 1972 and, in his words, the canton of Vaud (stretching from Lausanne through Vevey to Montreux and including the Vallée de Joux) was a "gastronomic wasteland". For Carlo, there have been two distinct food eras in Western Switzerland, "BG" and "AG", meaning "Before Girardet" and "After Girardet". Girardet, of course, is Frédy Girardet whose restaurant in Crissier, above Lausanne, garnered the well-deserved reputation as the finest restaurant in the world. Convincingly branding the AG era as most decidedly his, Girardet trained many of today's leading

CRISCI HAS ACCOMPLISHED A STEADY CLIMB UP THE MICHELIN AND GAULT&MILLAU LADDERS WITH TWO STARS AND 18 POINTS.

lights in Swiss gastronomy such as Philippe Rochat, Gérard Rabaey and Philippe Chevrier. But in the BG era when Carlo began, things that today are taken for granted, such as the finest fresh fish being flown in daily, were not part of cooking *à la vaudoise*.

So Carlo sought broader horizons. For a full decade before his acquisition of Le Cerf in Cossonay, he did tours not only in other regions of Switzerland but Germany and the UK. But not all the influences came from working under other chefs. During this same period, Carlo became intrigued by the *nouvelle cuisine* movement and especially by the work of Michel Guérard in Eugénie-les-Bains. What attracted him was the emphasis on a lighter and fresher style and the joy of creating new dishes daily based upon what was available in the market. This brought a whole new dimension to his budding career, that of emotion. Carlo draws an analogy to watches. One can tell time with a 50-CHF watch or with a *belle montre* such as a fine Blancpain. And the difference? It's emotion. Carlo found emotion in food from the spontaneity of creating dishes

Couteau de l'Atlantique au lard d'Arnad et son sable.

according to what the market offered and from the freedom of applying classic techniques in new lighter and fresher ways.

That was his jumping-off point as he opened the doors of Le Cerf. There he steadily climbed up the Michelin and Gault&Millau ladders to his present lofty perch of two Michelin stars and 18 points in the Gault&Millau.

If the principles of *nouvelle cuisine* liberated Carlo from the strict confines of rigidly applied recipes, he has freed himself in his views of other elements of the restaurant experience. In many ways he joins Guy Savoy (*Lettres du Brassus* Issue 6) in examining creatively the fine details of dining. Like Guy Savoy he has solved the water-at-the-table problem. How many times, even in the most luxurious of restaurants, have you been approached with the question "still or sparkling" when it comes time to refill the water glass? At Guy Savoy the question is never posed as the still water glass is of one form and the sparkling of another; the waiter need never pose the question. At Le Cerf, the water glass has been uniquely crafted to be two

sided, much like an hour glass, one half clear (for still water), the other half frosted (for sparkling). In both cases, at Guy Savoy and Le Cerf, the diner's experience is elevated as the sparkling/still question need never be asked again once the water is ordered.

But why end the careful examination of the table with the water glasses? Carlo focused his powers of observation on the plates as well. For many circumstances he decided that a triangular form would be superior to the traditional round one. This is because placing the long side in front of the diner allows more space for convenient placing of the glasses. As for the matter of sauces, that too became a design factor. Perhaps because the people who design Limoges are not cooks, the shapes of plates, nearly without exception, are symmetrical. Pleasing to the eye, but not accommodating to sauces. Carlo wanted his plates to fit his recipes and have troughs located strategically to capture sauces and allow plating of the food adjacent to the trough. The idea is so brilliant and, with a moment of thought, so obviously right, that it is astonishing that others have not reasoned their way to the same conclusion. One final touch. Carlo does not believe in the monstrous borders that are found commonly in today's restaurants. Indeed, he is derisive of those precious presentations of a miniscule quantity of food (he laughs at the purveyors of these artfully designed miniature food constructs saying that you need a watchmaker's loop to examine what you are eating) against a vast sea of white plate border; so in Le Cerf, the borders are of minimum size producing a less crowded table surface.

There is actually a connection between Carlo's ideas for his plates and what he places upon them. At first blush, there is a degree of whimsy in seeing two-sided water glasses, triangular plates, and asymmetrically placed sauce troughs, but with reflection the conclusion quickly comes that this is all completely

Frivolité de homard aux senteurs de sous-bois et asperges.

Chevreuil d'été en matelote de cerises parfumé au lierre terrestre.

logical and that if others had devoted the same degree of creativity and attention they would have come to similar solutions. In his approach to cooking, Carlo is similarly innovative and inventive but at the same time purposeful. Indeed, the best description of his cooking approach springs out of any conversation with him. In person he bubbles over with an infectious, irrepressible energy. Arms waving, staccato syllables spilling out at warp speed, all punctuated by laughter every few instants, it is plain that this animated ebullience must find its way into his food. And it does. He creates his dishes to amuse himself and plainly he succeeds. But never for a moment does he stray from logic or deviate from the base of classical cooking techniques. Said another way, there is always joy in his kitchen (and that spreads to his always smiling wait staff) but never artifice.

Every meal at Le Cerf begins the same with, of all things, an herbal broth. Carlo calls it a *jus de la prairie* ("field juice") and, plainly amused, notes that a diner can find it either utterly magic or extraordinarily common. It is hard to imagine how anyone could conclude the latter as the *jus* is many times "brewed" with 25 kilos of field herbs which have been reduced by a factor of 645 to 1. The composition actually depends upon the season. Even the method of producing it changes during the year. Sometimes it is brewed as a tisane which produces a dense tea that calls to mind less the herbs of which it is composed than it does smoky meat with hints of Japanese miso. Of course, neither meat nor miso are used, these are flavors of the herbs that only assert themselves at the levels of concentration that Crisci achieves. At other times of the year, the wild herbs are cold pressed and then later warmed to room temperature to produce the "tea".

Alongside the opening broth, which actually is served before the aperitif, is a *flûte d'encre de seiche,* a jet black twisted

stick of puff pastry which camouflages itself against a black slate bread dish. Then, once discovered, it first seems to be part of the table decoration, so perfectly blended is it with the slate slab. Of course, it offers perfect crunch in company of the broth and following aperitif.

What follows is a parade of *amuse-bouches*. The repertoire is vast. Particularly outstanding is a *fraîcheur d'huître*. This is a single oyster, coated in a luminous green kiwi sorbet, and nestled in a second "oyster" of sorts, only these are *feuilles d'huîtres,* leaves of edible oyster flower plants from Brittany. Meant to be finger food, the diner is invited to grip the leaves encircling the oyster and pop the whole assembly at once into the mouth. What follows is a sensational explosion of flavors, briny oyster punctuated by *fleur de sel*, refreshing tart sorbet as a counterpoint, everything only slightly mellowed by the salad of leaves. This combination easily merits being a course of its own.

Two other regulars are *couteau de l'Atlantique au lard d'Arnad et son sable* and *boudin noir glacé et son émulsion de pommes de terre*. With the *couteau* morsels shellfish are coated in a thin layer of lard, bringing with it added mouth feel and richness. The *sable* is not, of course, sand, but toasted rice contributing not only a contrasting crunch but toasty overtones as well. The *boudin* is not exactly a *boudin* as it has no casing; instead it is composed of just the filling of the normal dark sausage, akin to a dense mousse, served cold, and poised on a warm potato emulsion. The *boudin* mousse is, as it properly should be, rich. However, Crisci elevates what normally is bistro faire to a new plane by adding accents of caramelized bits of pear and the elegant potato emulsion. The result is the yin and yang of a peasant dish made luxurious.

Foie gras de canard à la broche, en duo de café et mélasse de grenade.

Crisci has a vast seafood talent. His range extends from the technically challenging to the whimsical. His *rouget* puts on display deft technical mastery. This is a fish whose preparation is always fraught with peril. If it is out of the sea for half a day too long it becomes overpowered by unpleasant "fishy" overtones. Undercooked it is too mushy. Overcooked it is unrewardingly dry and fishy. Crisci navigates clear of all of these pitfalls with a triumphant *lamé de rouget au citron de Naples, velours d'amandes aux senteurs de berce.* This is a dish which not only shows off Crisci's fine touch with the notoriously tricky *rouget*, but his cleverness in plate design. The *rouget* is seared giving it a crunchy exterior and, owing to millimetric precision of the cooking time, a just translucent interior. It is poised upon a concentrated *purée de courgettes* adjacent to the center trough of the plate which was home to a spicy ginger infused sea urchin broth nestled around a vegetable brunoise; the depression in the plate isolating this broth and preventing it from diminishing the crunch of the *rouget*. An almond oil emulsion infused with *berce*, a wild plant that imports a citrus-like tang, flanks all of the elements. This is a preparation brilliant in its conception as every single bite reveals a new dimension.

At the opposite end of the scale comes playfulness with a *cache-cache de langoustine et pétoncles en velours de haricot di Spello. Cache-cache* is of course the child's game of hide and seek. If that's meant to be a game of giggles, the dish holds up its end of the bargain. The apparent langoustine, with its tail carapace and exterior pink meat, is in fact composed of the tiny scallops that have been stuffed into the exterior skin of the langoustine. As for the real meat of the langoustine tail, it is tightly curled into the form of a large scallop and grilled, for all the world, taking on the bearing and appearance of a scallop. The remainder of the plate carries the small Italian beans and bean purée. For all of its evident whimsy, the *cache-cache* presents all of its elements with their essential nature and *saveur* intact.

Carlo's fascination with seafood texture is shown in two preparations featuring crusts. *Croustillant de tourteau et avocat à l'oxalis* is a cannelloni formed of the familiar and classic

combination of crab and avocado. Two accompanying sauces and the crunch of toasted seeds at the ends of the cannelloni move the dish from home cooking to the luxurious. The first sauce is an emulsion of crab gelée and olive oil, the second in a contrasting green color is composed of oxalis (sometimes called "wood sorrel" even though it is not related to sorrel at all). The oxalis sauce brings a satisfying tartness to the rich combination of crab and avocado. A second riff on the crust theme is *croustillant de crevettes rôties en curry de maïs et poivron pimenté.* The shrimp are presented as small cylinders, seared until crusty at each end, but left otherwise translucent, the mild curry and corn sauce pairs naturally, accented and focused by the spice of the pimento.

The chef's Italian heritage comes forth with his *tagliatelle de pétoncles en nage de coquelicot et Jabugo.* This is a pasta bursting forth with surprises and contrasts—bits of salty Spanish ham, a spicy emulsion of poppy threads, subtle sweet of the baby scallops infused into the pasta. It is a dish that achieved a nearly impossible combination of intense flavors and lightness.

In the spring, lobster is paired with white asparagus in the *frivolité de homard aux senteurs de sous-bois et asperges.* This is a combination that in all of its dimensions is utterly classical—lobster paired with wild mushrooms, asparagus paired with wild mushrooms and lobster paired with asparagus. What sets this apart is that it is a multi-tiered set of pairings. Of course, it is completely satisfying.

Crisci's foie gras preparation, *foie gras de canard à la broche, en duo de café et mélasse de grenade,* is on the one hand expected and on the other novel. The presentation of warm foie gras with endive confit, and a sweet-tart citrus grenadine reduction sounds completely conventional notes. What is unexpected is coffee in the sauce. The earthiness of the coffee deepens and sophisticates the dish.

Classic cooking with added dimension is well on display in Le Cerf's *chevreuil d'été en matelote de cerises parfumé au lierre terreste.* The venison is perfectly cooked in a filo-like shell and offered a magnificent vaporize in the mouth texture. Carlo

IT IS THE EXUBERANCE WHICH SPEAKS IN EVERY DISH THAT MARKS THE SPECIAL OCCASIONS OF A VISIT TO LE CERF.

stays in familiar territory in the pairings of a cherry-based sauce, beets topped with a potato purée and, at the side, a confit of turnip. The unexpected was inclusion of the *lierre* which is a weed sporting tiny blue flowers (sometimes bearing the particularly unromantic name "ground ivy") which grows in the region. In keeping with many of his preparations, this added yet another earthy layer of flavor. Duck likewise offers classic accents, even if the cooking method is novel, with his *canard de Challans parfumé à l'impératoire cuit sous atmosphère d'azote*. A bit forbidding in its description, it really is based on the traditional fruit (in this case cherry) spice pairing with duck. He surrounds the duck in a nitrogen atmosphere to prevent oxidation of the meat as it cooks; there is no alteration of flavor; indeed the natural quality of the duck is better preserved with this method.

An elaborate meal of this class deserves a cavalcade of desserts as its finale and that's exactly what Le Cerf delivers. Not counting the *petits fours,* no less than three dessert courses are offered, followed by a trolley groaning with chocolates and chocolate desserts. The opening salvo is an assortment of five sorbets nestled into another of Crisci's ceramic inventions, a rectangular box, divided into five separate compartments, insuring that one sorbet will not melt into its neighbor. What follows depends on the season. Some venture into completely novel territory such as *fraise décomposée, fenouil mariné et olives confites.* To put it most directly, fennel and olives are not normally the stuff of dessert. But with deeper reflection they can be. The fennel, prepared correctly, is sweet. And adding salty notes to dessert often is the mark of sophistication (such as salty caramel). In a word, the combination works brilliantly. If the strawberries stretch the envelope, tradition is firmly represented with a *bordure d'abricot confit en duo de crème brûlée et framboise parfumée à l'impératoire*. Two of the best foils for apricots are caramel and raspberries and this offers both.

There is challenge in the chocolate trolley: the risk of excess in a meal. But caution should be thrown to the wind for a chance to try his full throttle chocolate tart, deep bitter and intense. This is a tart for adults who want their chocolate unmasked from excess sugar.

Carlo Crisci succeeds brilliantly as a disciple of modern, yet classical cooking. But most of all it is his exuberance which speaks in every dish that marks the special occasions of a visit to Le Cerf. •

Bordure d'abricot confit en duo de crème brûlée et framboise parfumée à l'impératoire.

Marie-Laure Tarbouriech

AN ENGRAVER TAKES THE CROWN

MARIE-LAURE TARBOURIECH IS NOW A MEMBER OF THE CLOSED CIRCLE OF FRANCE'S BEST ARTISANS, AS ONE OF THE ELITE IN HER CRAFT.

TEXT: **MICHEL JEANNOT**

The announcement came in spring this year and the event was scheduled for the fall. Marie-Laure Tarbouriech, an engraver at Blancpain, was invited to Paris, France, to receive the prize for professional excellence—a medal, but above all the official recognition of her immense talent. Looking forward to sharing the honor with her is an entire team, a workshop and a company. The award ceremony is to take place at the Sorbonne University, followed by a reception at the Élysée Palace with French president Nicolas Sarkozy in attendance. Thus, this 39-year-old craftswoman from a southern suburb of Paris sees her work consecrated by the prestigious title of "one of France's best artisans". How did she get so far? Her track record deserves to be told and the profile drawn of a demanding professional with a sure touch and proven technique who upholds an ancient skill at a level recognized as exceptional.

Marie-Laure Tarbouriech has remained an unassuming woman who discloses little of herself. She might well be passionate, but she confines herself to the essentials. You have to encourage her to put herself forward, and getting her to talk about herself, her life experiences and her achievements needs persistence. Little by little, with the occasional remark or revealing detail she tells her story, just as she works, without forcing the pace. The pieces of the puzzle gradually coalesce into a coherent picture.

She's always been an avid reader, but what interested her most from the earliest age was drawing: "I started drawing very early on and took lessons from the age of seven." Such early vocations with personal convictions of a future mapped out do indeed exist. Endowed with an artistic bent inherited from her father and grandfather, she decided in her second year of high school that she would attend the celebrated Boulle School in Paris. But to apply she needed a baccalaureate—a high-school diploma. This was her first clear objective with the applicable motivation.

THE BOULLE SCHOOL, A MEASURE OF SKILLS

Two years later, with a diploma in financial management—a subject only distantly related to her core interests—she enrolled for the highly selective competitive exams to enter the school of her dreams, and was accepted as a candidate at the age of 19. She was reluctant to admit it, but you have to consider that out of the thousands who apply every year only 200 are selected to take the exam. At the end of the ruthless selection process, only two dozen gain entry to the school. The journey from dream to reality was full of major obstacles that she successfully overcame. But this is what it took to build the confidence and determination with which she met later setbacks.

To start with, she chose the craft of engraving dies and molds. "My father also went to the Boulle School," she admits, "and I'm the third generation engraver in my family." The school, which has a reputation of turning out talented people, teaches the old techniques, the authentic craft of engraving with its traditions, skills and knowledge. Marie-Laure Tarbouriech there learned direct engraving in relief or in intaglio, design and the creative process. She went on to work in the ornamental engraving and chasing departments. "These are three complementary crafts. During our training period, we took three- or four-week courses in the neighboring workshops to learn and master more skills."

She took advantage of the four years of schooling to forge a number of contacts. "Boulle is a bit like a family. It's now 15 years since I left the school, but I am still in touch with the workshop teacher, Mr. Le Hir, and with former students. Every year, there's an open day, which is a great opportunity to meet and exchange news. I go regularly. We share the same memories, which is always a pleasure and keeps us connected. But, above all, we had the same teachers who had a great influence on us all." The Boulle alumni are evidently an elite out of the same mold, working with a common approach and sharing values, a regard for traditional skills and upholding the same standards.

FROM PARIS TO BESANÇON

She graduated from the Boulle School in 1995, leaving that most stimulating of educational crucibles to enter the world of employment, and looking forward to building a career by putting into practice all that she had learned. However, she soon had to shelve her ambitions and abandon her illusions. "I spent six months looking

for work in Paris and I found nothing. At that time, the big fashion for lapel pins was running out of steam, and for many Parisian engravers who had built their client base and turnover exclusively on this sector, the end was brutal. I therefore spread my search to the whole of France and I found a job in Beaune."

Four months later, her firm, which produced gilding irons, brass embossing dies for printing and heat molding for perfume boxes, moved to Besançon. And she of course had to move there as well. Without knowing it at the time, she had come close to the geographical center of watchmaking. Her tasks alternated between hand engraving under strong magnification, chemical etching and mechanically assisted engraving. "It was very industrial with programmed and numerically controlled milling tools. I had to do the polishing and the final touching-up by hand." So far as artistry and craftsmanship were concerned, it wasn't quite the job she had dreamed of at Boulle—but that was to come. Meanwhile, she was able to carry on her trade as a manual engraver, mastering techniques, but the jobs soon became repetitive. It's a sure sign of a sharpened appetite for progress and the need to accumulate experience. She therefore enrolled at evening classes in

drawing at the Besançon Academy of Fine Arts. At the same time, she joined the local roller-hockey team as goalie. Life is, after all, a question of balance.

COMPETITION AT THE PARIS MINT

In late 2005, the firm that had employed her for 10 years closed its doors for good. But weep not, for it is often said in such circumstances that difficult periods give companies or individuals the chance to grab new opportunities. Marie-Laure Tarbouriech's situation is a prime example. She was quick to bounce back—not once, but twice…

Her training in the traditional methods at Boulle had always left a deep impression on her. When a place became available at the Monnaie de Paris—the Paris Mint—in 2003, she applied. Founded in the 9th century (in 864), this institution produces the euro coinage for France. But that's not all: "They produce all kinds of military medals, decorations and special coins." She passed the tests, but she wasn't immediately employed because she came in the second rank. "But I was the priority candidate for the next job within two years." That appeared to have settled her fate, for some time afterwards she heard from the Mint. The road was clear; the job awaited her in Paris. But it was too late. Everything had meanwhile changed for her in the winter of 2005-2006. By then she was already employed at Blancpain.

BLANCPAIN'S HEAD ENGRAVER

The watch manufacturing company in Le Brassus had in fact been looking for an engraver when Marie-Laure Tarbouriech found herself—not for long—on the job market. After working with renowned engravers for many years and having become specialized in the art, Blancpain decided to set up its own engraving workshops and to develop this craft in Le Brassus, for only manual engraving is worthy of a fine watch. To this end, Blancpain discovered the rare gem that is Marie-Laure Tarbouriech.

Watchmaking abounds with perfectionists, and it is obvious that Marie-Laure Tarbouriech in particular is one of them. She works by the principle that you must always do the job properly down to the smallest details. Engraving by hand requires a mastery of the techniques because recovering a mistake is not always possible. "You have to keep calm, always keep calm. You don't need brute force for the job but you need your strength to control the tool when you do detailed work. You

simply cannot afford to slip up." This kind of work needs specific qualities and a special aptitude for drawing and sculpture in bas-relief.

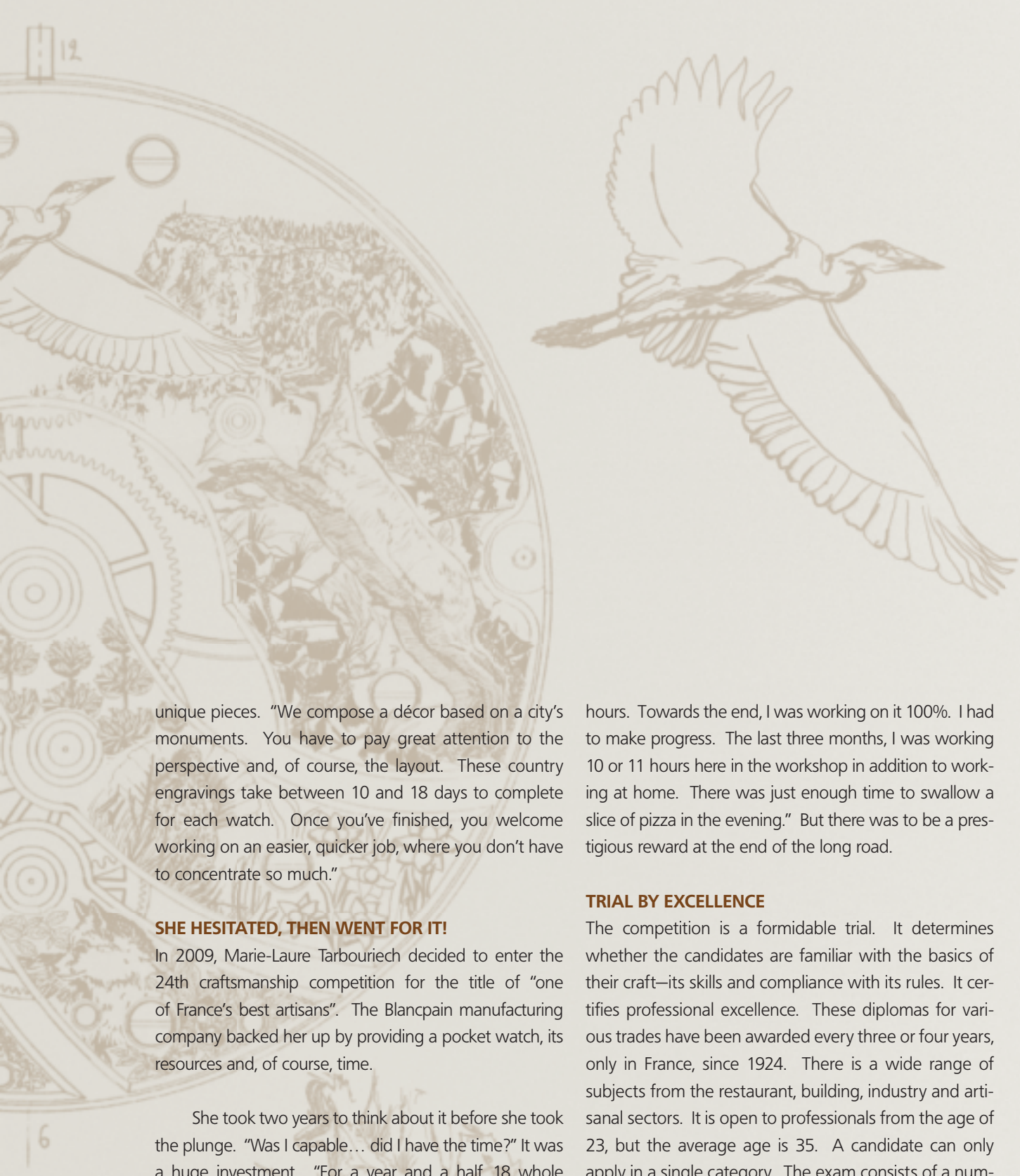
Had she any connection with watchmaking before joining Blancpain? "I only discovered mechanical watches when I came here," she says with a big smile. "But the connection came right away. The watchmakers who do the complicated mechanisms have the same enthusiasm for the job as I do. Finding people like that was a bit strange to start with. But it made me happy. In our line of work, those who are not passionate about what they do will turn out insipid work. The trick of the trade is to put your soul into the job, and the result is obvious. If you work on a piece when you're tired or under the weather, it won't turn out as beautiful."

Marie-Laure Tarbouriech's dream has come true. Her job at Blancpain allows her to ply her craft in the spirit of the Boulle School. The company set up the engraving workshops to be able to respond quickly to clients wanting to personalize their timepieces and acquire unique objects. Demand rose immediately, especially for engraved winding rotors. "Today, we have fewer requests for custom work because we're making lots of limited series with our own designs. We offer engraved watches so that clients can find the kind of decoration they like without having to wait for a customized piece."

The procedure is always the same. The engraver sketches the design, changing it and perfecting it as necessary. Once that is done, she gets to work on the matter itself, translating her design into precious metal. The idea is to create volume. "Starting on the blank, you remove material around the design to create the relief." There is also the task of polishing to bring out the effects of light. It's a painstaking job… "You really have to commit yourself."

As of fall 2011, five engravers are now active in Blancpain's workshops. Marie-Laure Tarbouriech's colleagues, graduates from the fine-arts academies of La Chaux-de-Fonds and Mulhouse, have different backgrounds in watchmaking and printing. The team provides a cross-fertilization of ideas and skills. "We all try to be able to do all the jobs to prevent stoppages if one of us is away. We also try to show one another a bit of our own way of working. The purpose is to widen the range of skills in the workshop by bringing together craftsmen and women with different training backgrounds." If you point out that she's the only graduate from the Boulle School, she immediately comes up with: "I'd like to have one more Boulle graduate in the team."

At the end of summer in 2011, Marie-Laure Tarbouriech is busy decorating movements. "All the bridges and the rotors are decorated in the calibers 232, 233 and 235—the manual or self-winding minute repeater, and those with an automaton." Among the pocket watches, it is mainly the 15-*lignes* movement that is decorated with wind roses, papyrus or palm leaves. "There are always a few winding rotors to be engraved for events like the Super Trofeo, a car race that we are much involved with." Also in production is a new decorated series called Countries which consists only of



unique pieces. "We compose a décor based on a city's monuments. You have to pay great attention to the perspective and, of course, the layout. These country engravings take between 10 and 18 days to complete for each watch. Once you've finished, you welcome working on an easier, quicker job, where you don't have to concentrate so much."

SHE HESITATED, THEN WENT FOR IT!

In 2009, Marie-Laure Tarbouriech decided to enter the 24th craftsmanship competition for the title of "one of France's best artisans". The Blancpain manufacturing company backed her up by providing a pocket watch, its resources and, of course, time.

She took two years to think about it before she took the plunge. "Was I capable… did I have the time?" It was a huge investment. "For a year and a half, 18 whole months, you have to abandon everything—parties, going out, sport. You have to drop everything and only concentrate on the task. It's very restrictive."

Her preparations for the competition went in parallel with her work. "I worked both at home and here on the time that the company accorded me out of my working hours. Towards the end, I was working on it 100%. I had to make progress. The last three months, I was working 10 or 11 hours here in the workshop in addition to working at home. There was just enough time to swallow a slice of pizza in the evening." But there was to be a prestigious reward at the end of the long road.

TRIAL BY EXCELLENCE

The competition is a formidable trial. It determines whether the candidates are familiar with the basics of their craft—its skills and compliance with its rules. It certifies professional excellence. These diplomas for various trades have been awarded every three or four years, only in France, since 1924. There is a wide range of subjects from the restaurant, building, industry and artisanal sectors. It is open to professionals from the age of 23, but the average age is 35. A candidate can only apply in a single category. The exam consists of a number of practical tests with set as well as free subjects, involving technical challenges. There are three stages to the competition: the applications were in by the end of 2009; the qualifying tests took place in March 2010, and the finals in May 2011. Around 2,000 candidates enrolled in 138 disciplines, 838 qualified, 620 submitted their work and 235 of them finally got their reward.

The qualifying tests took place shortly before the 2010 Baselworld watch and jewelry show. "It meant spending a day at the Estienne School in Paris. In the morning, we had to engrave a 4-centimeter-high letter in steel; in the afternoon, we had to create a composition. We had been given a theme a few weeks earlier: Roman art. We all turned up with our documents and we had to do some sketches of medals. Then we had a short interview with the president of the jury who had to decide whether we were technically capable of entering the competition and if we were prepared to see it through to the end. We were six engravers divided into two specialties: intaglio and relief engravers."

Having gotten through the first stage, Marie-Laure Tarbouriech was invited to take part in the decisive test with two pieces to engrave. The first was a set subject: "They gave us a drawing and we had to reproduce it. It was a bust of a warrior dressed in fancy armor by Leonardo da Vinci." For the other piece, "we had the choice of three subjects: plants and animals, dance, or Milo of Croton." She chose the first subject. "I had to design the motif and I naturally decided to do it on a watch. At first, I wanted to do it on a wristwatch with a full calendar and a winding rotor based on the 1150 caliber. But as I sketched out the patterns, I realized that it didn't suit. The

"You have to keep calm, always keep calm. You don't need brute force for the job but you need your strength to control the tool when you do detailed work."

bridges were rather small and there wasn't enough space, so I reset my sights on a pocket watch." She then had a year to finish the two pieces, which needed more than 530 hours of work—300 for the bust and 230 for the pocket watch.

It was a very close finish. "I had to deliver the two engravings at Clermont-Ferrand as well as all the documents detailing the different production stages. That was an extra task. The deadline for delivery was the end of April. The watch was put together on the eve of my departure." Marie-Laure Tarbouriech laughs as she recalls the suspense of those final days. "I completed the engraving just before Easter and I had to deliver the work the following Friday. The rhodium-plating and the assembly had to be done before then. My workmates at Blancpain were fantastic. They made it a priority and worked very fast. While they were putting the work together, I was completing the layout of my document file. Needless to say that at the end I was on my knees, totally exhausted, but I still had to travel to Clermont-Ferrand to deliver the pieces."

She has a vivid memory of that strange feeling when months of tension were suddenly relaxed. "After

so much stress it's such a let-down. You hand in the work, photos are taken, you sign documents and it's thank you and good-bye. Then you find yourself in the car park wondering what to do. It's all over. There's nothing for it but to go home. And wait."

A week later, on May 7, she gets an e-mail message: she has won! "I received a congratulatory e-mail from the secretary general of the committee that organizes craft exhibitions (COET), which staged the "best artisans in France" competitions. It seemed unreal. I couldn't believe it at first. Funnily enough, I didn't believe it for the next four days. It was only when a member of the jury, who was also an engraver and one of Frances "best artisans" called me to confirm the fact, that I really grasped it. I could then announce the news."

The last distinction for engraving was awarded in 2000. This time, three were awarded. "You might have several prize-winners or none at all." According to the rules, "the distinction gives you the right to wear the bronze and enamel medal on a ribbon in the national colors" as well as a blue, white and red collar on your workshop blouse.

After months of pressure, Marie-Laure Tarbouriech is above all left with a deep sense of gratitude. She is now a member of the closed circle of France's best artisans, as one of the elite in her craft. Her skills are recognized worldwide. She's more confident, but still very tired. "I have a lot of worries at the end of the week. I had read interviews with chefs who said it took them six months to get over it. I think it might be the same with me."

Of all her work, the pocket watch is the most important, the most complicated and the most accomplished piece with a great sentimental value. "It was my most difficult task. I worked with binocular lenses magnifying up to 46 times, but I would have liked to be able to zoom in a little more." The timepiece is now at Blancpain, but Marie-Laure Tarbouriech hopes to be able to make use of it one day.

MORE PEAKS TO CLIMB

Now, her professional activities are continuing. Marie-Laure Tarbouriech has recently engraved a Blancpain Villeret Grande Décoration for the Only Watch auction. It's a unique piece, especially made for the charity auction for the Monaco association against Duchenne muscular


BLANCPAIN

dystrophy. She decorated the bridges with a landscape of the Rock of Monaco and its hinterland.

Today, Marie-Laure Tarbouriech's wish is to "try to go even further, and to teach others". She insists on one point: "You must always improve, surpass yourself and master the skills. She has a number of projects including the reproduction of a drawing by the renowned Dutch graphic artist and engraver Maurits Cornelis Escher. "I like his work, and it's to see if I can transform an impossible perspective into intaglio engraving, or if it's possible to combine perspective with his way of drawing." Another project is to attempt a full engraving—an original idea. "We do full engravings set with gems. We won't just engrave the winding rotor, but the whole movement, the dial, the case—in fact, the entire watch."

She has her own engraving tools. "My grandfather died before I went to the Boulle School. He never knew that I wanted to be an engraver. But I inherited a large part of his tools which I use every day. I have some old tools with cutting shapes that you don't find anymore. I have compasses that are a century old and still very useful sometimes."

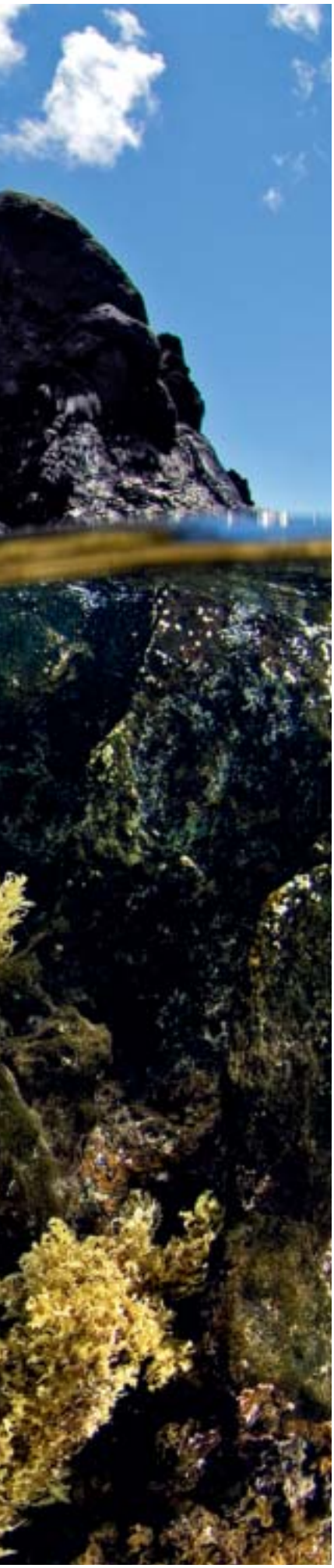
Ask her if becoming one of France's best artisans has changed her life and she laughs: "It only means you have to buy a lot of champagne." •

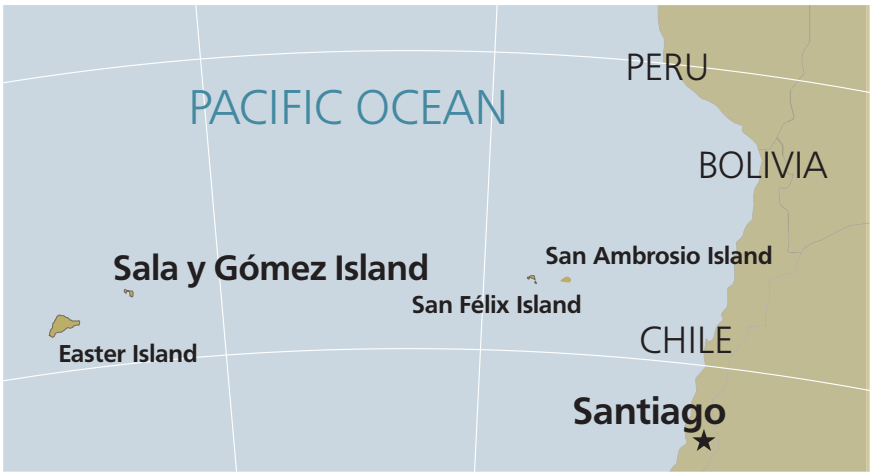
The Blancpain - National Geographic PARTNERSHIP

Blancpain is delighted and proud to announce that it has become the partner of the National Geographic Pristine Seas Expeditions. Under a three-year agreement, Blancpain has provided for the sponsorship of three Pristine Seas Expeditions, currently planned for Pitcairn Islands (UK Pacific Ocean Territories) for March-April 2012, and two other locations now under negotiation with local governments. These pioneering expeditions by the National Geographic Society, through scientific research and media outreach, are dedicated to the protection of several of the world's last remaining wild places. JSK

SALA Y GÓMEZ – THE LOST ISLAND

TEXT: DR. ENRIC SALA
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER-IN-RESIDENCE





When I was a little kid in Spain, I remember spending many an hour browsing my atlas of the world. It was my favorite book, and its pages were dog-eared because of so much use. I was always dreaming about exploring the remote places on the planet, and learned them by heart, from the remote capes of the Russian Arctic to the tiny islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Among them was an island called Sala y Gómez—a dot in the middle of the South Pacific that had my name! At that time, there were no personal computers or Internet, and all I could learn about the mysterious island was a small entry—barely a paragraph—in the encyclopedia at the public library.

Thirty years later I was back in Spain, on a sabbatical period from academia, planning my next big project. My dream of exploring the last reaches of the ocean had become true, thanks to the support of the National Geographic Society. I was bound to explore and survey the last pristine, unknown places in the world's oceans, and help to save them from human exploitation.

Sala y Gómez had always been on my mind, and after some research I found that what we knew about the sea around the island had not improved much from that short encyclopedia entry of my childhood. My heart was jumping with anticipation. I had to go! The decision was made. We partnered with Oceana Chile, the Chilean Navy, and the Waitt Foundation, and in February 2011, I conducted one of the most exciting expeditions of my career.

Getting to remote places always follows a similar pattern. From old photographs or satellite photographs we have an idea of what these places look like, and thus we build our own mental image. But this image has to be readjusted with the physical reality of actually knowing the place. It starts with a blip on the radar, which within hours starts to take shape. Then comes the first visual contact of the place through binoculars, from the bridge of a ship. This is one of the most satisfying moments of all.

To reach Sala y Gómez, we were going to sail from Easter Island on the *Comandante Toro*, a modern offshore patrol vessel of the Chilean Navy. Easter Island, Isla de Pascua in Spanish, is one of those enigmatic places that grew in our collective imagination since we were kids. I imagined a treeless island covered with grass, with imposing stone heads near the shore, shrouded in mystery and silence. That's what I found, exactly as I imagined. Scholars claim that the deforestation of the island by the Rapa Nui eventually caused the collapse of their civilization. The current Rapa Nui inhabitants of Easter Island are the descendants of the only 200 Rapa Nui that survived that collapse. We know what happened on land. What happened underwater? Would it also be a barren world, caused by overexploitation of the marine resources?

Jumping in the water at Easter Island made me feel like jumping off a cliff. The comfortable feeling of weightlessness that I usually experience diving turned into vertigo, for the water was so clear that it seemed there was no water, and I felt like falling into the void. Once I adjusted to the new environment, I glided to the bottom, to be surprised once again. Half of the bottom was covered by healthy corals of delicate blue, pink and ochre tones. That beats the best place in the Caribbean.

I dived closer to the corals and saw little bumps on their branches. I swam still closer, and the little bumps became alive. They were little snails the size of a toenail that live and feed on the corals. From within the branches appeared little damselfish with electric blue colors. When I approached them, a brown moray eel with thousands of yellow spots darted out of a coral and gave me the scare of the day. The coral gardens harbored a myriad little, colorful fishes: damselfish, wrasses, triggerfish, butterflyfish. About half of these species are found only at Easter Island. Because it

But the large fishes–sharks, jacks, tuna–were all but absent. Why?

was my first dive at Easter Island, every other species I saw was a personal discovery. I spent the entire dive attached to the bottom, enjoying all those little creatures.

The air in my tank was running low, so it was time to go back to the surface. I went up a few meters and swam over the corals, as if flying over a forest canopy. A few meters above the bottom, the little fish became little dots. A few more meters up, and the dots disappeared. I could only see the corals. That moment I realized that I was diving over an empty landscape. The visibility was extraordinary—about fifty meters—but all I could see was a gorgeous coral garden with no large fish. It was like flying low over the African savanna and not seeing any large animal. Was that typical of Easter Island? To find out, my team and I dived all around Easter Island during the following days. We found the same pattern all along. The corals were abundant and healthy, and at some sites they formed intricate canyons and caves of spectacular beauty. But the large fishes—sharks, jacks, tuna—were all but absent. Why?

We talked to Easter Island divers and fishers, and the response was similar: there used to be lots of tuna, amberjack, sharks, and large lobsters, but they have become rare in the last thirty years or so. The explanations were as diverse as the people we talked to, and included too much fishing by the locals, industrial fishing offshore by foreign vessels, climate change, and natural cycles. It is typical of fishers worldwide to be in denial of the main cause of fish declines—fishing itself—and blame everyone else and everything else. However, abundant scientific research shows that the main culprit for the disappearance of the large predators of the ocean is too much fishing. There was one way to find out: to travel to the uninhabited Sala y Gómez island, 200 miles away, and see if the large fish were abundant there. Sala y Gómez has the same climate as Easter Island; the main difference between the two islands is, apart from their size, that there is virtually no fishing at Sala y Gómez. All other things being equal, if we found large fish and lobsters at Sala y Gómez we would know for sure that fishing at Easter Island has been too heavy.

The main goal of our expedition to Sala y Gómez was to conduct the first scientific survey of its underwater ecosystems, to provide the baseline for a new marine park. The waters around the island were declared a no-take area in

Sala y Gómez was but a dark rock, the tip of a pencil sticking out of the deep Pacific Ocean.

October 2010—the Motu Motiro Hiva Marine Park (as the island is called by the Rapa Nui)—after an effort led by Oceana Chile, National Geographic, and the Waitt Foundation. The Chilean government saw the unique opportunity of protecting the likely pristine environment around Sala y Gómez, and decided to close to fishing 150,000 square kilometers of sea. This is one of the largest no-take marine reserves in the world.

On February 21, 2011, we boarded the *Comandante Toro* and sailed to Sala y Gómez. The little island is 200 miles from Easter Island, and we expected to arrive in the afternoon of the following day. That night I could barely sleep, with anticipation and excitement.

We were woken up by the Navy's speakerphone system at 7:30 am. The night before, the boat rocked for a while, and we feared bad weather. Sala y Gómez is so small—only 700 meters long—that only under calm sea conditions would we be able to dive. Any swell or wind-caused waves will cause breaking waves near the island—the only obstacle that the sea encounters in hundreds of miles.

After months of preparation, we were close to our destination. I was caught in a maelstrom of thoughts and feelings—of excitement, satisfaction, and happiness. We saw Sala y Gómez when we were about 10 miles away from it. It was only a dark rugged line breaking the horizon. And finally we made it—at 1:30 pm on February 22, 2011. Sala y Gómez was but a dark rock, the tip of a pencil sticking out of the deep Pacific Ocean. The swell was breaking all around the island, and it seemed that there was no shelter. But that was not going to prevent us from diving. As soon as we anchored the ship and lowered the inflatable boats, we went in the water.

The first dive in an unexplored location is like a blind date. You're about to meet someone who you want to be very special—and hope not to be disappointed. We were not. I knew we were going to witness something that few humans have seen, and hoping to bring those instantly-formed memories back home, for everyone to enjoy and learn from.

The swell was large and, when we were doing our shallow dives, we felt as though we were in a washing machine.

Our first dive was at a reef 50 meters off the southeast corner of the island. We found it because waves were breaking wildly on top of it, creating white foam that erupted like a volcano. With my heart racing, I jumped in the water far enough from the reef not to be sucked up by the breaking waves. Three ridges that disappeared in the deep supported the reef like buttresses in a cathedral. Visibility was so extraordinary here that it was deceptive; I believed it to be shallower than it actually was—by as much as 10 meters. Diving down one of the ridges I reached a tunnel, 4 meters high and 10 meters across. I entered the tunnel, and turned on my flashlight. On the ceiling and walls of the arch the light beam revealed a slipper lobster and a dozen spiny lobsters. The spiny lobsters were enormous and had curled antennas 0.5 meter long. They looked like monsters from another planet. Looking outside the tunnel I saw twelve Galápagos sharks, their silhouettes cut against the blue. They were swimming calmly, apparently not affected by our presence. I found what was missing at Easter Island, and that gave me a big relief.

During the next week we conducted three dives every day, sometimes in quite difficult conditions. The swell was large and, when we were doing our shallow dives, we felt as though we were in a washing machine. This and the excitement of exploring new sites kept my heart beating overtime.

We saw many more sharks and other large fish. Looking up to the breakers was like watching a clear sky with white cumulonimbus clouds growing and shrinking with every wave. The amberjack, black trevally and rudderfish, which were abundant at Sala y Gómez, seemed to be flying below these underwater clouds. Often a shark swam by like a torpedo, disappearing in the white foam, and reappearing a few seconds later, effortlessly, without moving a fin. That was a good reminder that we humans are only visitors to the underwater world, invited to catch a brief glimpse before returning to the surface, unable to compete in grace and speed with these hydrodynamic creatures.

We conducted our scientific survey at Sala y Gómez, and took thousands of photographs and a hundred hours of underwater video. The data confirmed what we could see with our own eyes, that Sala y Gómez was nearly pristine, and that the

Further diving revealed nets and fishing lines tangled on the corals. That explains why the large sharks are rare at Sala y Gómez.

absence of large fish at Easter Island was likely due to intense fishing. But we were still puzzled. Sala y Gómez had three times more fish than Easter Island, but most of the sharks were relatively small, no more than 1.5 meter in length. We would have expected to see more large sharks in such a remote, uninhabited island. Were our assumptions wrong, or did something happen at Sala y Gómez? The answer to this question came to us unexpectedly one morning.

After a quick breakfast, our eyes still half closed, we crawled to the upper deck, exhausted after several days of diving. Once on deck, we started assembling our gear, mechanically, as we had done thousands of times before. Somebody said: "Is that a boat right there?" We were the only people at Sala y Gómez. Or were we? We looked out and saw a small fishing boat several hundred meters from the *Comandante Toro*. I ran to get my binoculars. The fishing boat was anchored and had deployed some buoys and fishing gear in the water. The captain of the *Comandante Toro* appeared on deck, followed by his interception team. The sailors carried weapons and vests, and jumped onto a small boat. They motored to the fishing boat, and boarded it. Through the radio we could hear that the fishermen arrived the night before, caught a couple of tuna, and were hoping to catch more. When asked whether they knew they were in a no-take area, they replied that they were outside of the marine park. That was very disingenuous; they were *right in* the marine park. The captain applied the Chilean law, giving them a hefty fine, and ordered them to sail back to Easter Island, where the naval authorities were waiting for them.

That first enforcement action by the Chilean Navy sent a powerful message to anyone interested in poaching in the Motu Motiro Hiva Marine Park. It also showed us that there has been some fishing at Sala y Gómez in recent times. Further diving revealed nets and fishing lines tangled on the corals. That explains why the large sharks are rare at Sala y Gómez. The good news is that the Chilean government has protected this place just in time. Large fish are abundant, and so are small sharks. Now that they are protected they can only grow and increase their numbers. This is exactly what the Chilean government expected when they created the marine park—to preserve and restore this unique site that is a natural heritage of all humanity.

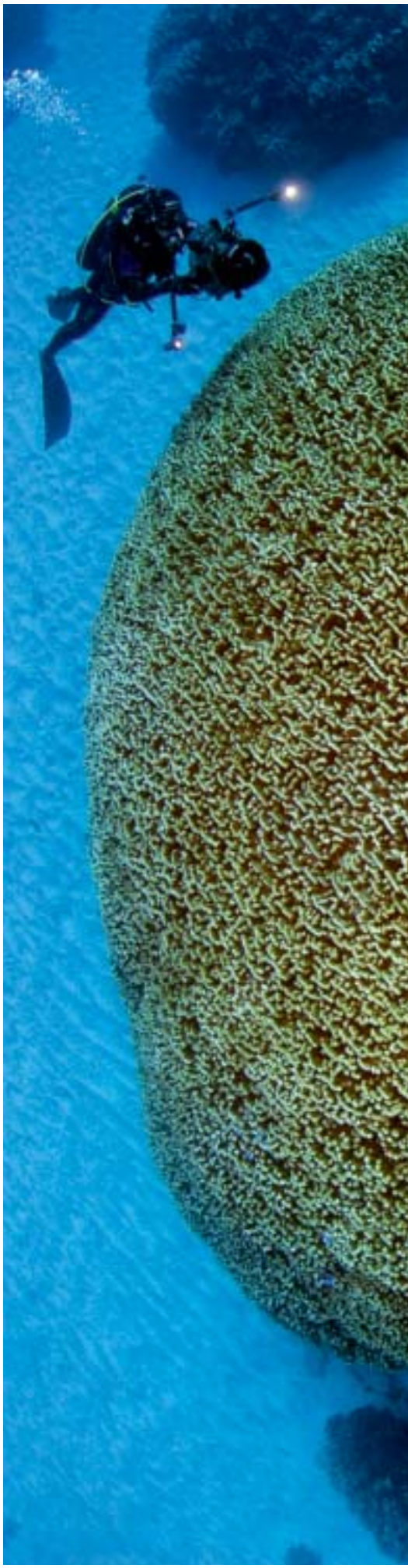
Sharks and large fish such as amberjacks and trevally became active again, and welcomed us below our boat as we jumped in.

Expedition life is so intense and focused that we internalize the rhythms of nature. We woke up at seven, before sunrise. At first light we saw the shearwaters leaving the island in all directions, flying to fish many miles away from the island. As we jumped in the water at nine, the sharks were quite active, swimming below our boat and then around us, until they lost interest. The big swell that scared us the first day now felt like the breathing of the sea, and we used it to get closer to the schools of rudderfish that grazed the shallow rocks in between sets of waves.

Our last dive of the day, at dusk, was the most magical. When the rays of the sun entered the sea obliquely, the light was softer, the water bluer, and the colors more vivid. Sharks and large fish such as amberjacks and trevally became active again, and welcomed us below our boat as we jumped in. After another hour enjoying and studying wild nature we returned to our mother ship. At nine in the evening the shearwaters returned to the island, flying from all directions, as we enjoyed the sunset from deck. It was pure bliss.

Before finishing the expedition we had to get on Sala y Gómez. We were dying to see up close the thousands of seabirds that nest on the island. Setting foot at Sala y Gómez, however, was one of the most physically demanding things I've done during an expedition. Waves were breaking continuously all around the little island. There are only a couple of places where it is possible to get close with a small boat and jump in, between sets of waves. We were like surfers, waiting for the perfect moment, but instead of catching a wave we were trying to avoid them. We were able to climb onto the island, and spent a few hours filming and taking photographs. We saw a pristine intertidal pool so crystalline that it seemed it had no water. Five minutes later, a wave broke over the rocks and turned the quiet pool into a foaming bath.

We left the island one by one, jumping onto the small boat, which came close to the rock for only a couple of seconds. I found it exciting—and terrifying. When the waves were not breaking, the sea level was going up and down 4 meters within a second. Our only window to jump onto the boat was when the sea level went up and the boat could get close to the rocks. We all did, although not too gracefully. The last one was our cameraman Neil Gelinas, who filmed the entire operation from



We first dived there wondering what its underwater world was like; now we were leaving feeling part of it.

the island. He packed his camera in his backpack and positioned himself on the rock, waiting for the boat to come close. But then a rogue wave crashed *from behind,* unexpectedly, and washed him down. We could not see where he went. When the white foam disappeared, we saw Neil hanging from the rock with one hand, his face torn with pain. He crawled up the rock while a second wave crashed over him. Then the sea went up and we rushed the boat close to him. He did not wait for the boat to be close, and threw himself down like his life was depending on it. Three of us tried to catch him and we all ended up on the floor of the boat. Neil had dislocated his shoulder, and his camera was destroyed. Had he fallen off the rock, he could have been crushed by the breaking waves. At least we were able to put his shoulder back in place.

During our last evening at Sala y Gómez the sun set with a gorgeous green flash, and soon afterwards the sky was populated with millions of stars. Away from any source of light pollution, the Milky Way showed off its splendor. I cried for being so privileged. We spent only a week at Sala y Gómez but it already felt like home. We first dived there wondering what its underwater world was like; now we were leaving feeling part of it.

Postscript: The scientific research conducted by the National Geographic and Oceana Chile team revealed a pristine shallow ecosystem and unique deep seamounts, where half of the species are found nowhere else on the planet. The team recommended to the Chilean government the expansion of the Motu Motiro Hiva Marine Park, to include several of those seamounts and afford more protection to this unique area.

The Lost Sharks of Easter Island, a TV documentary on the expedition, is being shown internationally on National Geographic Channel. To find out what's happened since this publication and to know more about National Geographic's Pristine Seas project, please contact Enric Sala at esala@ngs.org


BLANCPAIN

THE BLANCPAIN

RÉVEIL

JUST WHAT ARE THE "ESSENTIALS" FOR A TRAVEL WATCH? IF YOU DEVOTE SOME THOUGHT TO THE QUESTION AND EXAMINE THE BLANCPAIN RÉVEIL, YOU WILL FIND IT OFFERS THEM ALL.

TEXT: **JEFFREY S. KINGSTON**

"All my bags are packed, I'm ready to go, I'm standing here outside your door,
I hate to wake you up to say good-bye.
But the dawn is breaking, it's early morn, the taxi's waiting
He's blowing his horn.
Already I'm so lonesome I could die.
So kiss me and smile for me, tell me that you'll wait for me,
hold me like you'll never let me go.
'Cause I'm leaving on a jet plane, don't know when I'll be back again. Oh, babe, I hate to go."

This John Denver classic ditty runs around my head when I think of travel watches.

If we are talking about travel watches, let us consider the serious travelers—the frequent fliers, the multi-million mile Pooh-Bahs, the road warriors, those who have been anointed by the airlines with gold status, platinum status, even diamond status. Some are even bestowed with the rank of Senator. You know them. These are the traveling pros. These are the fliers who know the inside of airports better than their own homes, who know which seats in which rows of each type of aircraft are the best, who know what FEBO[1] means. These sultans of airplane seats have developed traveling into high science. Being scientists they have checklists of travel essentials. One of those essentials is a proper travel watch.

What exactly do these traveling pros look for in a travel watch? What are the essentials of this essential? Essential 1—two time-zone displays. (The traveler needs to know the time where he is, local time, and home time.) Essential 2—the local time must be displayed more prominently than home time. (After all, local time is more important since all events that effect the traveler where he or she currently happens to be are measured in local time.) Essential 3—changing the local time should be seamless and the hour hand must jump in precise increments forward and backward. (No sense fussing and fuming setting the watch and disturbing the other passengers in first class.) Essential 4—home time must be displayed in a 24-hour dial. (It won't do to call home at 3 am instead of 3 pm home time—"Oops, sorry dear. Did I wake you up?") Essential 5—a date display that changes forward and backward if local time crosses midnight. (Could it be any other way?) List is getting long, isn't it?

A WATCH THIS COMPLEX DID NOT HATCH OVERNIGHT; ITS DEVELOPMENT SPANNED NO LESS THAN TWELVE YEARS.

Alright, let's guild the lily. We are talking *professional travelers* here. The big leagues. Let's be demanding. The travel watch has to have *everything*. There are three more essentials, number 6—an alarm function, a *réveil.* (Just the thing when one is fighting jet lag, have the watch be the crutch to rely on. Do you really trust the 18-year old clerk at the hotel's front desk to get the wake-up call right?) Essential 7—the numerals of the watch and its hands should be easily visible in the dark. (When that one eye pops open in a jet-lagged haze, being able to read the time in a dark room counts for a lot.) Finally, essential 8—a power-reserve indicator for the alarm. (Disaster if the alarm is set and does not go off because there is no way of seeing its state of wind.)

There you have it. A tall order of requirements necessary to please the connoisseur who knows what he or she wants and insists upon getting it. Well, you HON Circle, Executive Club Gold, Diamond Medallion, 1K, Executive Platinum, Club 2000 members, Blancpain has conceived the watch for you, and it is called the Réveil.

Contained within the Réveil's case is every single one of the eight essentials.

A watch this complex did not hatch overnight. The gestation of the movement, known as the caliber 1241 (and in some models, the 1241H) spanned no less than twelve years! Not an elaboration of an existing movement, it was designed by Blancpain from the ground up. The development saga is best understood by considering the many functions of the watch individually. These are the alarm, the GMT, the main train of the watch including winding, and the power reserve.

The alarm. Many elements of modern watch design can be accomplished, at least in the first instance, with a computer. Powerful programs exist at a movement designer's disposal for designing balances, escapements, gear trains and the like. No such luck when it comes to a *sonnerie*. The design of sounding mechanisms, apart from the most crude rap on the caseback genre, is a black art. Painstaking trial and error is the order of the day to get it right.

The starting point, of course, is deciding what type of sound the watch should make. Initially, Blancpain thought of making the watch ring like a minute repeater. That is to say "ding (pause) ding (pause) ding (pause)". All to be very musical. Considerable design work was done with this goal in mind. As the work progressed, however, it was decided this was the wrong way to go for a watch whose purpose was to be a *wake-up alarm*. As pretty and musical as a minute repeater

[1] For the non-platinum status travelers, FEBO means "Front Even; Back Odd". What does THAT mean? Still not decoded enough? It means that menu orders on the plane are taken from the front first when on an even-numbered flight and from the back first on an odd-numbered flight. The pros select their seats accordingly so that they may be assured that their menu choices will not run out before the order is taken.

may sound, its rings are best appreciated when the watch is held up to the ear by a person who presumably is already wide awake. Traditional repeater rings simply aren't loud enough to function as a *réveil*. Further, long pauses between dings consume a lot of energy which shortens the period during which the alarm can sound. Thus, two years into the project it became time for a new conception of the *sonnerie*.

As Blancpain considered the problem further, it saw the alarm sound as being part of a continuum. At one end was the musical classical repeater; at the other end was a harsh, non-musical rap against the case back. The first was certainly elegant and refined but not suitable for the wake-up function. The later was perfectly suitable for jarring the owner awake, but lacked elegance and refinement. Recognizing that, the Blancpain team sought a middle ground. Rather than lightly "ding" and pause before the next "ding", the watch should constantly ring. But it must ring loud enough and with a degree of edginess so as to perform a wake-up function. So the Blancpain team went off in search of design that would musically ring, but with attitude.

THE CONCEPTION OF A *SONNERIE* CONFRONTS A MAZE OF VARIABLES.

Almost at once, it was decided that the alarm would have a hammer strike against a metallic ring which would run around the circumference of the movement. There were lots of reasons for this choice. First, classic minute-repeater and *sonnerie* design calls for this approach. The alternatives of having a hammer bang away against the case back or a small ring mounted on the case back each had significant disqualifying elements. Banging on the case back itself emits a harsh, unmusical sound. That might be acceptable in an inexpensive watch, but not a *haut de gamme* timepiece like a Blancpain. A metal ring mounted on the case back suffered from the drawbacks that it would prevent a clear case back (necessary for allowing the owner a view of the movement) and the further engineering drawback in that it would require a shaft to come up through the middle of the winding rotor.

At this point the team confronted a maze of variables. What metal to use for the ring? What metal to use for the hammer? Exactly where should the ring be attached—the main plate of the movement or the mounting circle? What should the shape of the ring be? How should the ring be attached to its mounting place? Where should the hammer strike in relation to the mounting point of the ring? And you thought it would be easy to go into the movement-design business?

A myriad of combinations of all of these variables were tried. Several key design elements were settled upon. First, top secret: the metal alloys used in the ring and in the hammer. These alloys fall into the category so secret that "if I tell you, I have to kill you". The next principle was the shape of the ring. Of course it would, like in a fine minute repeater, extend around the exterior circumference of the movement. But what would its shape be in cross section? A round shape was thought to be too musical to serve as alarm. To get that perfect degree of edginess to the tone, it was made rectangular in cross section. Next, how to attach the ring. In many repeaters the ring is soldered onto its mount. That produces a nice tone, but it has the disadvantage of muffling the sound somewhat. Again, to work as an alarm such muffling would not do, so the decision was made to screw the ring bracket onto its mounting position. Last, where to position the hammer relative to the ring mount. Physics teaches us two places that won't work: striking at the mounting point or striking at the far end. Imagine that the ring has a natural frequency of vibration. That vibration can be imagined to be a sine wave. For maximum effect, one would want to have the hammer strike at the physical place on the bar of the highest peak or valley, and never at the zero point. Again with experimentation that location was determined, which established the layout of the movement.

Lest you think that the alarm design work was finished at this point, remember the words of Academy Award winner

The heart of Réveil's alarm: the hammer and, also visible, a portion of the sounding ring.

The crown in any of its "non-time-setting" positions: clutch engaged.

Marisa Tomei as Miss Vito in the film *My Cousin Vinny:* "But wait, there's more!" The mechanism for activating the hammer had to be developed. Here it was a matter of causing the hammer to beat against the ring to produce the correct, alarm-like, edgy tone. This is accomplished by a toothed gear striking a rocker cam attached to the hammer. Again trial and error was the order of the day as the proper rate of hammer striking depends upon the materials in the hammer and ring, the natural frequencies of the ring taking account of the metal, cross section shape, mounting method and striking position.

Setting the alarm. Of course, having an optimized striking mechanism is all well and good, but after all, the critical function is having it go off when you want to. Here the Blancpain movement abounds with innovations. These include a column wheel mechanism and a first for an alarm watch, a clutch.

At the core are two disks which allow for synchronizing the time set for the alarm to the local time of the watch. This is done by mating three slots in one disk to three ribs in the other. One disk is tied to local time, the other to the alarm time. The alarm is set off when the local time disk turns to the position which allows the ribs of the alarm to fall into the three slots (at all other times the ribs simply ride on the underside of the local time disk).

When the two disks mate at the alarm time, the slight change in height which results unblocks a small pin (building your French watchmaking vocabulary, *goupille*) allowing the alarm barrel to unwind freely, spinning the gear which drives the hammer.

Of course, one does not want the alarm going off every twelve hours when the ribs and slots correspond in position, so there must be a means of blocking the alarm if the owner does not desire it to sound and a means of unblocking if he or she wants it to sound. Here Blancpain turned to a solution which lies at the heart of controlling *haute horlogerie* chronographs, the column wheel.

In the Réveil, the column wheel controls an arm that blocks or unblocks the hammer train by pressing on a pin *(goupille)* and controls the small hand that indicates on the dial whether the alarm is set or not. Why bother with a column wheel say you? The answer is the same for the *réveil* as with the finest of chronograph designs. A column-wheel system bestows a silky feel to the button controlling it. There is a feathery light touch to the on/off button which distinguishes the watch from other alarm-watch designs.

Now comes the really tricky part. It is rather standard to design *réveil* functions using the two-disk system described

The crown in the time-setting position: clutch disengaged.

earlier. That system has, however, one rather irritating foible which reveals itself in other alarm watches. If one turns the time backward, the instant that the two disks are aligned in the position that the ribs and slots mate, continued backward time setting will drag the alarm time with it. Result: the alarm-time setting will be disturbed and have to be reset.

The design team could have settled without tackling this problem. After all, it is *normal* for an alarm watch to possess this defect (of course, the spin meisters would quickly label this problem as a "characteristic" and sweep the problem from sight). Since this design was to be both a GMT and an alarm watch, where backward time setting might very well be the order of the day when the owner flies westbound, it would not do to join the pack with this backward time setting "characteristic". With the design of the watch largely done, the team came upon an inspirational solution. A clutch! When the crown is pulled out to the time-setting positions—either the first position which moves the GMT hour hands or the second which moves both hour and minute hands—a clutch arm presses the alarm disk out of the reach of the hour-hand disk. Thus, at no point can the ribs and slots mate and at no point can the hour hand drag the *réveil* hand with it. Result: as our multi-million miler sets the watch in the first-class cabin heading westbound, the alarm time set on the watch will be undisturbed.

Réveil winding. Blancpain advanced this watch beyond the norm for alarm in the winding mechanism. Again, letting the spin meisters choose our words, it is a *normal characteristic* of alarm watches, even automatic-winding alarm watches, for the alarm mechanism to require *manual* winding. The watch may be automatic, but the not the alarm. Not so with the Blancpain Réveil. The winding rotor of the Blancpain Réveil simultaneously winds both the barrel for the watch itself *and* the barrel for the alarm. As shown in the photo, as the winding rotor turns the center gear, the main barrel is turned one direction and the alarm barrel the other. Because it is critical to know the state of wind of the alarm in order to be sure that the alarm will in fact go off when it is set, a power-reserve mechanism was added to the alarm train. This is another first. Because other alarm watches have resorted to manual winding of the alarm barrel, they have not incorporated a power-reserve display. One simply wound the watch until the crown stopped.

GMT function. Here, the Blancpain team was able to re-utilize one of its tried and true systems. Its key components are a 12-toothed gear and a positioning spring. The fixed portion of the gear is calibrated to home time and is driven by the power train of the watch. The local-time hour hand is likewise turned by the power train of the watch. Its position, however, can be moved, forward and backward, to any one of the

troughs on the 12-toothed gear. Each one of those troughs is positioned in one-hour increments which allows the forward and backward adjustment of local time zones.

Blancpain's Réveil is available in a wide range of versions. In the L-evolution Collection, the Réveil is offered in both red gold and stainless steel, both with a case diameter of 42.5 mm. In the 40-mm Léman Collection, there are models in red gold, white gold and stainless steel.

FOR THOSE WHO DELIGHT IN MECHANICAL INNOVATION, THE BLANCPAIN RÉVEIL WILL BE IRRESISTIBLE.

What is remarkable is that our mileage Pooh-Bahs don't need to know any of the technical details that underlie the functioning of this revolutionary Réveil. They might not appreciate the fact that it possesses a column wheel; they only would sense the creamy feel of the setting mechanism. They might not know of the hidden clutch; they would just simply never be annoyed by the alarm time being changed as the time is changed. Yet for those who delight in mechanical innovation and elegant design touches, the Blancpain Réveil will be irresistible. As well for those who think about demands of travel and who understand practicality, the virtues of the Réveil will shine through.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GANTENBEIN

EVEN THOUGH NEITHER THE GEOGRAPHY NOR THE LANDSCAPE FITS THE CONVENTIONALLY ACCEPTED PROFILE, SWITZERLAND'S GANTENBEINS HAVE SUCCEEDED IN CRAFTING WORLD-CLASS PINOT NOIRS AND CHARDONNAYS.

TEXT: **JEFFREY S. KINGSTON**

Daniel and Martha Gantenbein.

There is a gauzy myth that swirls around the thoughts of financially successful entrepreneurs who, riding the crest of soaring achievements in business and anointing themselves in the words of Tom Wolfe as "masters of the universe", come to the firm conviction that a second career awaits as a winemaker. Filled with visions of a grand edifice for the winery, splendid tasting rooms, and most of all, themselves, as they become one with the soil and nature, the mental screenplay builds to a climax as stratospheric scores from the wine critics flood in and wine collectors scramble to beg for a bottle or two. Trouble is, it's all a dream. Wishful thinking at best. Do-it-yourself winemaking is bit like do-it-yourself brain surgery. Of course, almost anyone can turn a grape into an alcoholic liquid that can be labeled as "wine". Fair warning: the end product will likely vie with Fukushima water in palatability. But if against all that you really want to douse with freezing rain the myth of a second career as a world-class winemaker, try imagining producing pinot noir.

Money will allow one to become a gentlemen farmer or rancher. Maybe even a winemaker with forgiving grapes such as cabernet, sauvignon blanc or merlot. But not pinot noir. This is a grape that is fickle to the point of cruelty. Even in Burgundy, ground zero so to speak for great pinot, where they have had centuries to sort out every little detail of geography, planting, raising, harvesting and vinification, massive failures come around all too often. Of course, for those who have become addicts, and I freely confess my own hopeless habit, part of the thrill is in the chase to find those elusive great successes tucked away among the too frequent (and almost always expensive) disappointments. In a way, great Burgundy is a bit like a circus high-wire act for both winemaker and consumer alike. Difficult as it is to produce and find truly ethereal red Burgundy in France, the obstacles rise exponentially for pinot noir grown anywhere else on the globe. Think of it as walking a high wire across the Grand Canyon in the midst of a raging thunderstorm. With golf ball sized hail.

So it is that I generally approach a bottle of pinot produced outside of the hallowed ground of France's Côte-d'Or with the same enthusiasm as a prisoner braced against a wall in front of a firing squad. *Please put me back in my comfort zone with a bottle of Clos de Bèze or Musigny!* Then I tasted my first bottle of Daniel and Martha Gantenbein's Pinot Noir produced in the Swiss canton of Grisons. Only supreme confidence in the recommendation of the brilliant sommelier in Switzerland's sublime restaurant Le Pont de Brent (three Michelin stars and 19 points Gault&Millau under chef Gérard Rabaey and now in the able hands of Stéphane Décotterd and all but certain to gain those honors) persuaded me to mount that high wire over the canyon and order the bottle, that and the certitude that if it didn't work out I could always

send it back and plunge into the French Burgundy section of the wine card. Nothing like a performance bond waiting at the ready. The first swirls in the glass brought proceedings of the meal to a halt as abruptly as a downhill skier finding himself with one ski headed north and the other northwest. *Can this be Swiss?* Of course, Switzerland produces wonderful ranges of wines: chardonnay from Neuchâtel; chasselas from the Lavaux; syrah or cornalin from the Valais; merlot from the Ticino. *But this is pinot noir!* The first whiffs and sips bore no relation to "foreign" (meaning non-French) pinots. This had all the elegance, power, complexity and depth of a first-tier grand cru Burgundy. Served double blind (meaning without any identification of any kind) I would have spun out names like Clos de la Roche, Bonnes-Mares, Ruchottes-Chambertin. Only twice before, once with a far north coast California wine and again an Oregon bottle, had I come across a no apologies *(of course, this is not as fine as a French Burgundy, but we think you will enjoy it nonetheless)* "foreign" pinot. This surpassed them both. By a mile.

Next order of business, a pilgrimage to the village of Fläsch in the eastern Swiss canton of Grisons to discover the secrets behind this astonishing pinot noir wine. It is here that the Gantenbeins have been making wine since 1982. If their wine bridged the gap between Switzerland and France's Côte-d'Or, there was nothing in the landscape snaking up the road leading from the A13 suggesting such a bond. Whereas the Côte-d'Or offers up gentle slopes rising from a broad flat plane, Fläsch is nestled among magnificent craggy peaks. Visually, the setting says Saint Moritz and skiing more than it does wine. What accounts for this anomaly is a microclimate. As frequently occurs in Switzerland, nature bestows warm temperatures upon small valleys that nestle "just so" against tall peaks. The geographical formula remains for the most

part obscure so that it is impossible visually to pick out which particular valleys will enjoy this phenomenon; it just happens in some places and not others. Fläsch is one such example where it does.

The quality of Gantenbein wines cannot be explained by the microclimate alone. This is pinot noir, remember, a cussed grape that makes nothing easy. No singular other factor accounts for Daniel and Martha's success. It really boils down to their hard labor and devotion to the myriad of details that must come together to produce any world-class wine, and most assuredly pinot noir. It did not take long to come to the view that the Gantenbeins are obsessive about quality. Indeed, that conclusion arrived before the first hand was shaken and greetings exchanged. Everything meeting the initial gazes about the winery and surrounding vineyards broadcast attention to detail and a take-no-prisoners pursuit of quality.

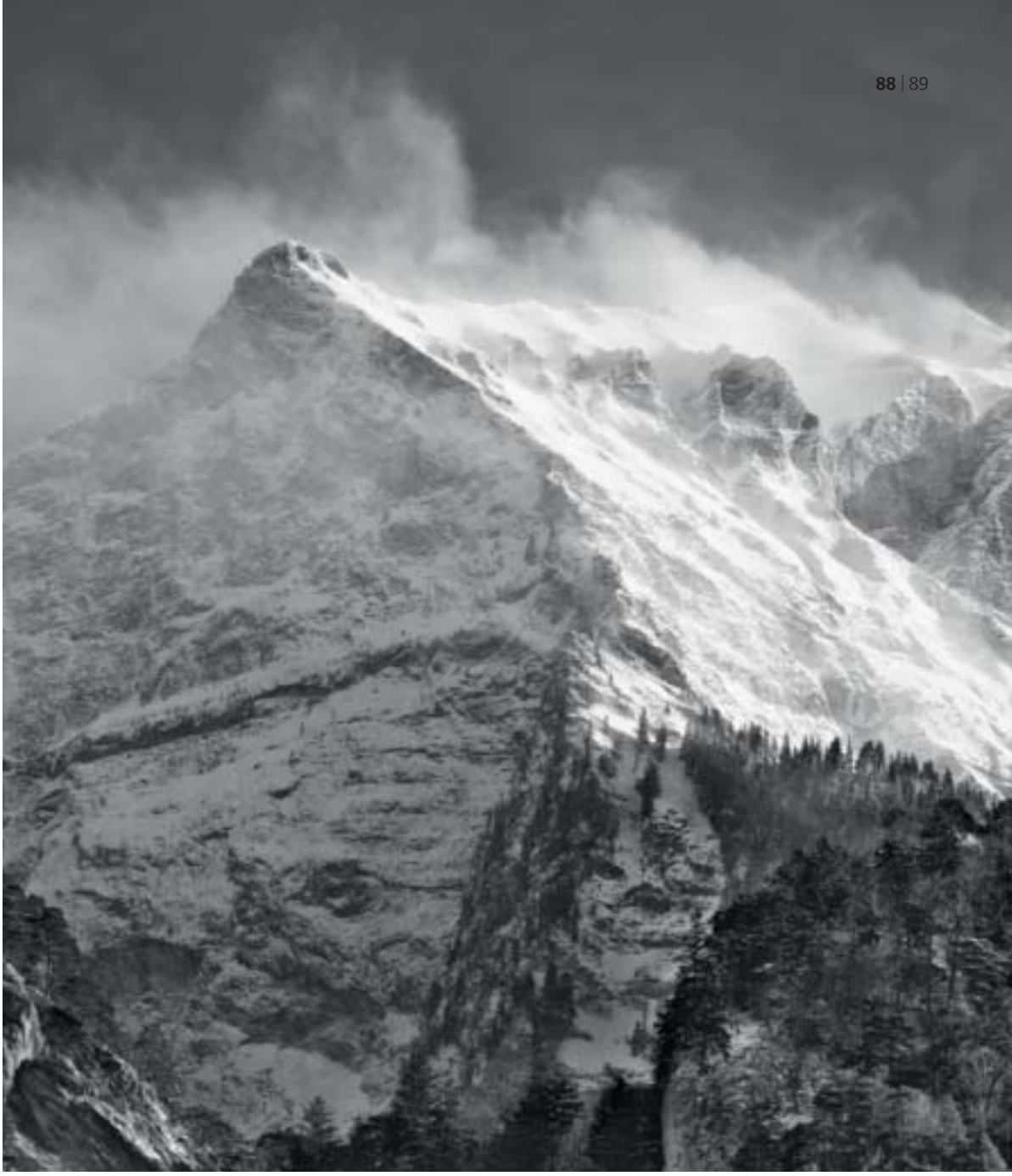
Burgundians affect studied rusticity. Throughout the Côte-d'Or winemaking facilities and cellars almost uniformly broadcast a certain primitive ambiance. The Mercedes may be parked out back, but the floors more often than not are earthen, equipment casually pilled without apparent organization, tastings conducted surrounded by barrels with spitting on the floor invited. As for architecture, the buildings are as they were 200 years ago.

Not so for Daniel and Martha. Their thoroughly modern winery rivals a watchmaking atelier in its ordered spotlessness. Attention was lavished even on the light fixtures. Daniel personally developed designs with a "hole motif", drilling holes in metal disks and cylinders to illuminate the rooms and the grounds. His father was responsible for the metal work. Of course, that does not insure the quality of the wine, but it is testament to the thoughtfulness and thoroughness of the

The Gantenbeins have focused on every detail, even lighting in the form of inverted wine glasses.

Gantenbein approach to winemaking. Daniel openly confesses that he visits Burgundy often (only a scant few hours' drive away) and that he freely borrows ideas and inspiration from what he sees there. Indeed, he counts many of the most renowned Burgundian winemakers as friends. So it is not unexpected that, today, over 90% of his vines are French clones. However, he has not simply planted French vines on Swiss soil and "hoped for the best". He recognized at once that even though Fläsch is located almost precisely at the same latitude as Gevrey-Chambertin, he would have to make adjustments in the vineyard to take account of climatic differences. For one thing, the Grisons experiences nearly double the rainfall as Burgundy. In response to this, the Gantenbeins have trained their French vines significantly higher than their French counterparts; whereas in Burgundy the stems begin as close as 10 centimeters above the ground, his are placed approximately 90 centimeters above the soil in order to protect the grapes from the possibility of rot propagated upward from moist earth. As well, because Fläsch is 250 meters higher in altitude than the Côte-d'Or, he plans his harvests, on average, to be approximately two weeks later than in Burgundy.

There is a saying that great wines are made in the vineyard. The Gantenbeins' quest for quality goes far deeper than adapting the French clones to the special climate of eastern Switzerland. There is a direct correlation between the quantity of grapes harvested per hectare and quality. As the quantity goes up, quality goes down. So the Gantenbeins take two important measures to limit production. First comes pruning. They prune off all but five stems per vine. Then after the fruit first sets, they systematically go through the vineyard and prune off some of the set clusters (a step called *vendange verte* or "green harvest"). As a result, the energy of the vine is devoted to fewer clusters, increasing the concentration of flavor.



Chalk this one up to the fickleness of pinot; there is no set "recipe" for converting grapes to wine. Whereas other *cépages* allow for more or less by the numbers step-by-step winemaking, pinot sets itself apart by punishing all those who try and find a set formula to follow. Reflecting that, there is a vast divide in Burgundy concerning when to allow fermentation to start after the grapes are harvested and deposited in the vat. Some allow the fermentation to commence essentially immediately. Others cool the grapes—blocking the start of fermentation in order that the grapes can macerate over a period of days. The Gantenbeins cast their lot in the later camp, allowing for cold maceration for 8-14 days before fermentation is allowed to begin. The reason for this is that the extended maceration period allows for greater extraction of color and flavor from the skins. More is involved, though, than simply deepening the color. Most pinot winemakers completely destem the grapes before they are placed in the fermentation vat. In doing so, they miss the opportunity to build in exotic spice flavors into the wine which would come with mixing in some of the stems. This is a practice followed by the very best Burgundian winemakers. In most vintages, Daniel prefers to include up to 20% whole bunches (thus including the stems) in the fermentation. And the downside? Inclusion of stems has a tendency to lighten the color of the resulting wine. However, because he cold macerates, that problem is avoided. To further the extraction, during fermentation Daniel pushes down the fermentation cap five or six times a day.

No detail is too small. Virtually all winemakers—in Burgundy and elsewhere—buy commercially produced oak barrels. Daniel and Martha insist on producing their own. The reason is that he can be insured that the barrels exactly meet his specifications. The oak is aged for three years and then given a long, but light toasting so that the color is not black, as

would be found in most commercially toasted barrels, but an even light brown. Daniel believes this gives the wine more subtle oak overtones which enhance the fruit without overpowering it. Even the fermentation vats are the subject of a unique degree of attention. The practice, even among the most prestigious domains, is to utilize stainless steel tanks. For the Gantenbeins, the vats are crafted out of oak to their exact specifications.

Not all the Gantenbein wines are Pinot Noir. They produce both Chardonnay and a very small quantity of Riesling. The same obsession with quality that distinguishes their Pinot Noir marks these two whites.

There is one respect in which the Gantenbein wines are bound to disappoint. It takes devotion to find them! Long before each vintage is bottled, it is sold out. Wine collectors who covet great Pinot Noir, Chardonnay or Riesling sign up well in advance to earn a privileged slot on the Gantenbein customer list. For everyone else, painstaking research to find wine merchants and restaurants is required (hint: you can find them at four personal favorites, Le Pont de Brent in Montreux, the Lindenhofkeller and Sein in Zurich, and Eleven Madison Park in New York). •

DR. GEORGE DERBALIAN

Dr. George Derbalian is a *Lettres du Brassus* wine expert. Dr. Derbalian is the founder of Atherton Wine Imports, located in northern California. Not only has he become one of the United States' premier importers of fine wines, but he has acquired a well-deserved reputation as one of the leading and most respected wine connoisseurs and expert tasters in the world. Each year, Dr. Derbalian travels the wine circuits of Europe and the United States, meeting with wine producers, owners of the finest domains, chef de chai, and other key figures in the world of wine. Throughout the course of each year, he tastes literally many thousands of current production and vintage wines.

In this issue it is our pleasure to introduce Dr. Derbalian to a wine which he has not previously experienced, the rare and sought after wines of Daniel and Martha Gantenbein.

Tasting notes:

2009 PINOT NOIR. A wine of elegance, delicacy and finesse. This was a year in which no whole stems were used. The wine offers up a nose of fresh raspberries followed by red cherries laced with vanilla on the palate. Medium weight. This is a precocious, flattering, easy wine. Very fine. ***

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2008 PINOT NOIR. Significantly deeper color than the 2009. A complex nose of spice and black fruits explodes from the glass. In the mouth there is a racy mixture of toasty vanilla, black cherries and blackberries with a long sweet finish. Great concentration and richness. Excellent. ****

•

2007 PINOT NOIR. Exciting fully developed nose of spicy blackberries. Stunning concentration and focus. The wine offers the sensation of tight berries popping the mouth, all surrounded by toasty sweet oak. Exotic spicy finish. Perfect balance and finesse. A superstar wine. *****

•

2006 PINOT NOIR. A black currant and black cherry nose gives way to coffee, sweet vanilla oak and concentrated cherries. Long sweet finish. Wonderful focus and precision in the flavors. A superstar wine. *****

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1999 PINOT NOIR. Noticeably different from the preceding wines. This comes from an era during which Gantenbein used predominantly Swiss clones. Delicate nose of strawberries, raspberries with a few whiffs of forest mushrooms. Medium weight with mature sweet red fruits and a medium-length finish. This wine is totally mature. Very good. ***

•

2009 CHARDONNAY. A citrus flower pineapple nose already well developed. A dancer on the palate with fresh acidic fruit perfectly balanced with toasty vanilla oak. Bright lively finish. Beautiful focus to the wine. Clearly, this wine will round out with another year or two of aging. A star. ****

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2008 CHARDONNAY. The nose is explosive with citrus peel, lime flowers and pineapple, followed by a rich round mixture of sweet butter, hazelnuts, and bright focused fruit. Extremely long finish of warm toasty butter and pineapple. Classic chardonnay of breed. A superstar. *****

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1999 CHARDONNAY. Deep yellow color. Remarkable legs show in the glass. Rich round buttery fruit in the nose is mirrored in the mouth with all elements, fruit, toast, oak perfectly blended and balanced. Sensational hazelnut finish lingers for more than a minute. Resembles a first-class Bâtard-Montrachet. A superstar. *****

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2008 RIESLING SPÄTLESE. Exotic fruit nose gives way to a racy blend of spicy pineapple and apples and a sweet apple finish. This would be a perfect wine to pair with foie gras. Excellent. ****

VILLERET

CHRONOGRAPHE MONO-POUSSOIR QUANTIÈME COMPLET

A COMPLEX INTEGRATION INTO A PURE FORM: ALL OF THE FUNCTIONS OF A COMPLETE CALENDAR MOON PHASE AND A MONOPUSHER CHRONOGRAPH.

TEXT: **JEFFREY S. KINGSTON**


TUE
MAR
BLANCPAIN
1735
Swiss

Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that's creativity.
Charles Mingus

In many ways, this captures the essence of the Villeret Chronographe Monopoussoir Quantième Complet. Truly it is a complicated watch bringing together within one case a monopusher chronograph; date, day of week and month calendar indications; and moon-phase display. Taken as a group, these are some of the most useful and classic complications of the watchmaking art.

But each of them are incredibly demanding with respect to the aesthetics of a watch, particularly so if they are to be grouped together on the same watch. Think about the number of hands required if they are all placed on a single dial: hour/minutes/small seconds require three hands; chronograph seconds, chronograph minute counter, chronograph hour counter three more hands; date, day of week, month, three more, if all shown by hands; moon phase, a disk. So by this count, the total would be nine different hands and a moon-phase disk. Then, if the chronograph is to be of the traditional double-button variety, the side of the case would bristle with two chronograph pushers and the crown. Finally, if traditional correctors mounted on the side of the case are used, add four separate dimples. So a hand here, a pusher there, a dimple elsewhere and we have imagined a watch with 17 different elements vying for attention on dial and case. If you value a timepiece by the number of separate "things" sprouting from its surfaces, you will delight in this number.

Blancpain's Villeret Collection, however, has a different mission. The hallmark of Villeret timepieces for more than thirty

The mark of a chronograph of breed, a column wheel to control and command all functions.

BLANCPAIN'S EXCLUSIVE UNDER-LUG CORRECTORS OFFER BOTH PURITY OF LINE AND EASE OF USE.

years has been refinement and understatement. So the challenge for bringing together all of these complications and staying true to the Villeret aesthetic was to find a way to "make the complicated simple". Every single complication was examined and simplified. Instead of a two-button chronograph, which requires three separate elements along the side of the case (a start/stop button, the crown and a return-to-zero button), Blancpain engineered its column-wheel-chronograph movement as not only a mono-pusher but, as well, one with the chronograph pusher co-axially integrated into the crown. The crown assembly that now accomplishes all of the crown functions, plus those of the chronograph, is only discretely larger than a traditional crown as the chronograph-button element appears as only a small addition to the cap. Thus, three elements go to one with the flank of the case simplified to the bare minimum of protrusions; to the eye only a crown is present. Of course, the full functionality of the chronograph remains as successive pushes of the integrated chronograph control command start, stop and return to zero. One point to add, beyond the aesthetics, in common with all Blancpain chronographs, this Villeret model utilizes classic column-wheel construction in the movement so that the feel of the pusher at the tip of the crown is guaranteed to be creamy and smooth.

A second application of "vanishing cream" was in store for the calendar and moon-phase adjusters. It is a given that calendar and moon-phase indications must have a means for setting and correcting if the watch is allowed to run down. The industry norm is to place the correctors on the side walls of the case. The appearance is that of a dimple. There is a difference, however, between the necessity to have correctors for a complex calendar and the necessity to clutter the case sides with them. Blancpain's solution, which owing to its patent is unique, consists of a system which locates correctors under the lugs. Thus, calendar correctors are removed entirely from the sides of the case and nestled, in a position which is completely out of sight, under the case lugs. The result: unblemished clean case sides—with the four corrector elements hidden. There is one added bonus. Not only is the appearance of the watch simplified and refined, but the under-lug correctors can be manipulated with a fingertip, unlike those conventionally mounted on the side which require a tool. Effectively, this is the "removal" of another four complicating elements.

The calendar display itself adapts perfectly for the combination with a chronograph. By showing the day of the week and month in small windows, not only are two hands removed,

but the two subdials for the chronograph (minute counter and hour counter) remain uniquely dedicated to the chronograph display without the complication of another indication utilizing the same dial area. To minimize the visual intrusion of the two windows, Blancpain designed them to be *ton sur ton* with the dial, that is to say, colored in the same tone as the rest of the dial. The indication is there to read when the owner desires, and otherwise blends into the rest of the dial when not being read. In effect, the calendar and moon-phase displays are reduced so as to consist of but one hand, for the date, and subtly integrated windows.

Beyond the removal of complexity in the calendar, two additional refinements were incorporated, one visual, one completely unseen. First is the date hand. In common with other Villeret complete calendar-moon-phase models, the Monopoussoir Quantième Complet utilizes a blued serpentine-form date hand. Serpentine hands recall an aesthetic, but a functional one, from two hundred years ago. In order to distinguish hands for supplementary indications, such as the date, from the principal time hands, according to watchmaking tradition they were given a distinctive serpentine shape such as the one utilized in the Monopoussoir.

The unseen refinement is in the movement itself. Blancpain has given the Monopoussoir its secure calendar technology. Essentially all complete calendar-moon-phase movements used elsewhere are constructed in a way that forbids corrections or adjustments during certain times of the day (usually a few hours before midnight and into the early morning hours). This is because during this period the calendar indications are changing. If with these watches a correction were to be manually applied during the course of an automatic change, there is substantial risk that the delicate gears of the movement would be damaged. That risk is completely eliminated with Blancpain's movement design. Any of the indications of the calendar/moon can be adjusted at any time of the day, whether or not the automatic change is underway, without risk of damaging the movement. The achievement of this risk-free secure design requires nearly 40% more components than a traditional complete calendar and vaults the complexity to nearly that of a full perpetual calendar. This, however, is one complexity that the owner does not need to see; it's simply there hidden beneath the dial, facilitating easy use of the watch.

The Villeret Chronographe Monopoussoir Quantième Complet is offered in 18 carat red gold with an opaline dial and in stainless steel with a white dial. Both models are housed in a 40-mm case. •

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