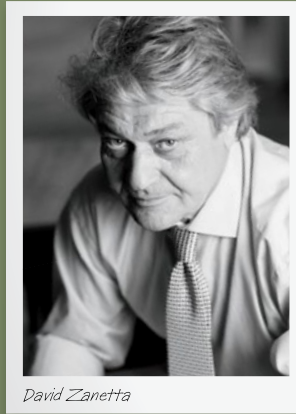
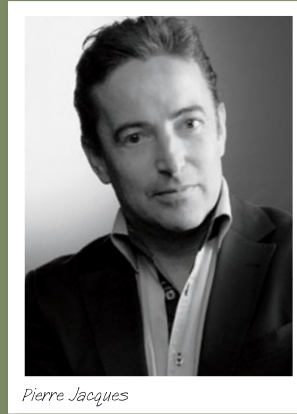


HIGH WATCHMAKING



David Zanetta



Pierre Jacques



Denis Flageollet

HIGH IDEALS DEFINE DE BETHUNE, HIGH IN THE SWISS JURA

BY KEITH W. STRANDBERG

The village of L'Auberson is a beautiful place in the Swiss Jura near the border of France, but it's certainly well removed from the major watchmaking centers of Switzerland (for example, Geneva, La Chaux du Fonds, Bienne). So why did the young Swiss watch company De Bethune choose to establish itself here in L'Auberson?

"This is an area of great mechanical culture, which has been producing music boxes and automata for centuries," explains Denis Flageollet, De Bethune's director of production and the creative force behind its numerous horological inventions and designs. "And, it's where I live," he adds.



The DB28T with
silicon-titanium
tourbillon



Photo by Keith W. Strandberg

Assembly and hand-finishing at De Bethune

The countryside around L'Auberson

When I rolled into the small Swiss village of L'Auberson on my Harley to meet the designer, De Bethune CEO Pierre Jacques and president of the board David Zanetta, who founded the company in collaboration with Flageollet in 2002, I received quite a reception. A De Bethune employee who had met me on the road when I stopped to ask directions had called ahead, and a company representative was waiting outside to greet me as I turned into the parking lot. I shortly realized that this kind of thoroughness is reflective of the entire culture at De Bethune.

THE IDEALS

De Bethune is guided by an unflinching devotion to the highest quality possible. "David Zanetta and myself founded De Bethune to pay tribute to great watchmaking that, in the past, raised the classic mechanics to the rank of a real artistic discipline both in the aesthetic aspect and in the technical aspect," Flageollet says. "It is a part of our cultural and historical heritage that we attempt to bring back the creation of exceptional timepieces fusing aesthetics and technology. The research and development department

of the De Bethune Manufacture is bringing the classical mechanical rules into the 21st century. All developments and patents are based on classic mechanics, applied to the new technology and new materials."

THE RAISON D'ÊTRE

Currently, the brand makes about 250 watches per year, and, even though production could be raised to 1,000 or more watches a year, both Zanetta and Flageollet are committed to keeping production numbers low—no more than 500 pieces a year—and quality high.

"We are not creating 'boys' toys' for a marketing brand," Flageollet is quick to point out. "With our background and our watchmaking experience, we design and create timepieces of the very highest quality, which are meant to reflect our artistic approach to watchmaking. Our customer is the connoisseur, who is passionate about watchmaking, and the person who appreciates and understands the highest quality and finest workmanship of our creations."

Focus on quality combined with innovation extends from the design studio to the production floor, where, Flageollet points out, the brand works hard to combine handmade, artisanal watchmaking techniques with industrial processes, various software and high technology. "At each step of the production, every single component has to pass quality control in order to proceed to the next stage," he explains.



» De Bethune's DB25 Perpetual Calendar

“A watch is an emotional and personal object,
which reflects the wearer’s personality and taste.”

—PIERRE JACQUES

THE CREATIVE FORCE

Flageollet is a bit of an iconoclast in watchmaking, honoring watchmaking’s past but intent on making his own impact on the present and future. As an artist, he refuses to be governed by market demands or the whims of anything outside of watchmaking and artistry. When asked what gets him up in the morning, for example, he replies, “I don’t have ‘mornings.’ I have my own rhythm, which is not necessarily

in line with the classic day. When I work depends on my projects and my inspiration. I enjoy almost everything about what I do, because I only do what I want to do. I hate wasting time doing unnecessary things. For the long term, I want to keep improving and producing innovations for the watchmaking industry.”

THE DIRECTION

Less than a year ago, De Bethune named Pierre Jacques CEO. Jacques was co-founder of GMT magazine, branch manager of the retail boutique Les Ambassadeurs Genève and has served as director of the organizing company behind the Grand Prix d’Horlogerie de Genève.

A knowledgeable and humble man, Jacques has been a great choice for the brand, which must emphasize its unique approach and stellar watchmaking credentials in an increasingly muddled watch pool. “Marketing speech is not enough today,” Jacques says. “Customers need to be secure with the brand and seduced by the product in terms of design and movements. A watch is an emotional and personal object, which reflects the wearer’s personality and taste.”

THE INVENTIONS

Since 2002, De Bethune has registered nine watchmaking patents and has produced 11 in-house calibers. Watchmaking innovations introduced in its product range include the Triple Parachute system (to protect the balance-wheel and spring from shocks), a unique Speed Regulation System (allowing the user to change the rate of automatic winding to match the watch’s use), reticulating lugs (for comfort), patented De Bethune self-adjusting double barrels (to transmit energy with optimum efficiency), a unique moon phase display (two hemispheres, one in platinum the other in blued steel), an in-house silicon/titanium 30-second tourbillon and much more.

THE FUTURE

According to Flageollet, the future for De Bethune will look the same as its past, as the company continues on the same path as it has since 2002—paying an incredible level of attention to detail, continually pushing the boundaries of watchmaking and maintaining the highest quality possible.

All from the little village of L’Auberson, high in the Swiss Jura.

212.729.7152, debethune.ch

» The DBM smartphone case with manual-winding watch

