

RICHARD MILLE THE MAN AND RICHARD MILLE THE BRAND are close to indistinguishable because all the ideas for the brand's surprising watch creations and its worldwide expansion begin in the mind of Richard Mille. This year, Mille's mind is set on the Americas. And, if the brand's past is any indication of its future, success is to be expected.

BY KEITH W. STRANDBERG

RICHARD MILLE'S MIND IS SET ON THE AMERICAS



RM 011 DLC Titanium Grand Prix Brasil



RM 011 DLC Titanium Americas White

"AMONG THOSE WHO LIKE WATCHES, ARCHITECTURE, CARS,

HIGH-END LIFESTYLE, RICHARD MILLE IS ALREADY WELL KNOWN." —JOHN SIMONIAN

OPENING DOORS

Richard Mille's Beverly Hills boutique will be the brand's 12th in the world. The others are found in Geneva, Paris, Dubai, Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong, Jakarta, Tokyo, Macao, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

"Each Richard Mille boutique shares the same DNA, but each one also has its own personality and soul," says Simonian, who is looking forward to using the boutique to further expand awareness of Richard Mille watches. "Among those who like watches, architecture, cars, high-end lifestyle, Richard Mille is already well known," he adds. "But I will be more than happy to personally explain the Richard Mille story to anyone in our new boutique."

THE LIMITED EDITIONS

To celebrate Richard Mille's push into the Americas, this year there will be two RM 011 limited edition watches. The RM 011 is known as the prototypical Richard Mille "racing machine on the wrist." A flyback chronograph with a sapphire crystal dial, the RM 011

was created with Formula 1 racing in mind. The two limited editions play with color: one is accented with orange, and the other is an all-black version. Each sells for \$90,000.

"The RM 011 is the pure essence of a technical watch," Mille explains. "It's the perfect combination of the technique, but at the same time is it ergonomic and easy to wear. The size is big, but it fits well on the wrist. I like to mix extreme technical qualities with ergonomics, along with lifestyle cues, with an artistic dimension and architecture. My vision of high luxury is that, whatever the level of complication of the watch, you can wear it anywhere, and it fits you well; it serves every purpose. In high-end watches, comfort has become an important parameter. Before, there were watches that were difficult to read, difficult to wind, and they were not very comfortable—now customers demand comfort and ease of use. Watches must be easy to live with, no matter the complexity."

The RM 011 with orange accents is produced exclusively for North America and South America; the all-black version is exclusive to the US boutique, and, according to Simonian, the brand could not have done better in choosing a model for this special edition. "The RM 011 watch means a lot to me, starting with the fact that Richard gave me the first prototype when he was developing it," Simonian says. "This watch contributed to a real takeoff of sales in our territory, because it represents the pure essence of the Richard Mille spirit. I love the sobriety of the all-black version and the fact that it is monochrome. And I am excited about it because it will be exclusively available in our Beverly Hills boutique."

THE MAN

The man behind the brand, Mille has quickly become a legend in the watchmaking industry. One of the first to push watchmaking to the extreme, his brand has become phenomenally successful. As Simonian describes it, "Richard's ability to think outside of the box is a huge part of our success." From Mille's

JOHN SIMONIAN

THE BOUTIQUE

Mille, in partnership with John Simonian, president of Richard Mille USA and founder of Los Angeles retailer Westtime, will open a boutique in Beverly Hills this summer, the brand's first on American soil. "My objective is to have a presence in terms of image," says Mille. The Beverly Hills boutique will share basic characteristics with the brand's existing boutiques around the world but with a distinctive American feeling.



RM 011 Felipe Massa America Titanium



RM 011 DLC Titanium Americas Orange

AMERICAN EXCLUSIVE

THE NEW RM 011 LIMITED EDITIONS FOR THE AMERICAS—the RM 011 DLC Titanium Americas Orange and RM 011 DLC Titanium Americas Black—have a case and a movement in common with all the watches in the RM 011 series. The case is substantial at 50 mm long and 40 mm wide, but its lightweight titanium construction and curved architecture make it comfortable to wear. Both models use the RM011S movement with automatic winding and variable rotor geometry, which allows the rate of rewinding to be optimized for the owner's lifestyle. There are just 30 examples of the orange version, exclusive to the Americas, and 50 examples of the black version, exclusive to the Richard Mille boutique in Beverly Hills.

point of view, however, he is simply having a ball doing what he loves to do. “I love working on new developments all the time,” Mille says. “I have plenty of new models to come, even this year. It’s always fun; for me, it’s only pleasure. There are sometimes headaches with problems and issues to figure out, but, at the end, it all works out. My only problem is to define the proper planning for each model. You always know when you start, but you never know when it will end.”

A key case in point is the brand’s model-numbering system, which was planned as a straightforward system of consecutive numbering for identifying consecutively introduced products. However, once some watches were delayed, things got muddled. “It’s a mess,” Mille admits. “The watches are numbered in the order of their creation, so RM 018 was introduced way before RM 025, but RM 025 is already on the market, while RM 018 has not yet been delivered.”

“I love the challenge and the problems,” Mille continues. “Taking seven years to bring 30 watches to market sounds like nonsense, but this is the way I love my watches to be. It’s just like this in Formula 1—it takes

a huge amount of work and research to release only a few models. I don’t want to change this way of working. Two years ago, I produced about 2,000 units; last year, I did fewer than 2,500; this year, maybe 2,800. My target for the long run is to make 5,000 pieces a year but no more.”

The principal wants to spend his time on research and development and design, not in marketing, which is what he believes he would have to do if he moved into higher volumes. “When you go over those limits, you enter another world where you spend more time in the commercial realm, more time with artificial things, where you don’t have time to take care of technical and design details,” he says.

Mille loves to create. So much so that the people he works with often plead with him to stop producing so many new designs. “I cannot stop myself from creating, and I always go from one model to the next,” Mille explains. “Every year, people think it’s not possible for us to have anything new or special, so I love to surprise people. For me, the flow of development never stops. I am never satisfied with what we have; I am always

working on the next watch, which is always my favorite.”

Because of his unconventional approach, Mille is seen as something of an agitator in the watch industry, and he relishes this role. “My friends in the art world tell me that the successful artists were all provocateurs,” he says. “What I do is provocative; it is a rupture. But, at the same time, there is a lot of legitimacy to the products. I compensate for a lack of history with a pure, genuine product. These days, when marketing speaks so loudly, it is more important than ever to be genuine and honest. I fight against marketing devices because they don’t correspond to extreme luxury. Today, we have clients who are very aware of what is happening in the watch industry. They are passionate, and they know a lot about the brand. Sometimes the clients know more about the watches than the sales people in the retailers, so it’s important to be genuine. You cannot lie.”

Richard Mille watches are known for their distinctive aesthetics, their complexity, first-rate execution, finishing and limited production. They are priced from \$34,000 to \$695,000, with some jeweled pieces at higher prices. “We will continue to combine the best of extreme technique and innovation with the best of the artistic and architectural dimensions,” Mille says. “We offer a watch you can live with that also captures the best of the Swiss watch culture.”

THE OUTLOOK

Having weathered the economic storm, Richard Mille, with the opening of the boutique in Beverly Hills, is poised for even more success. “I believe the Richard Mille brand will remain selective, dynamic and very high end,” Mille says. “Contrary to those who are obsessed with volume, trying to increase production every year, I am more interested in hearing people say that they were surprised by our latest watch, our newest developments. My only objective is to carry on surprising people. We will still have limited production, limited distribution, and we will work with friends, and we will enjoy developing crazy objects.”

Thank goodness the watch industry has people like Richard Mille, someone who isn’t afraid to take risks and upset the status quo. Just like some of his watches, Richard Mille is truly one of a kind.

richardmille.com



RM 011 Le Mans Classic Rose Gold

THE NEW FEM-TECH

RICHARD MILLE EXPECTS THAT THE BEVERLY HILLS BOUTIQUE will present a side of the brand that the current retail network does not emphasize. “My ladies’ watches are less successful right now because most of the retailers are watch-technical people—they are sharp and very macho, and 90 percent of their clientele is men,” he says. “However, sales of the ladies’ models are really booming in the boutiques, and I like that. So, the US boutique will enhance and promote the brand’s ladies’ watches. It won’t be a macho temple. My objective was to launch a ladies’ model without losing my soul and without losing my technical image. I wanted to combine both worlds in harmony. The watch is feminine, but it is still mechanical.”