

A Vallée de Joux exclusive: launch of a sundial watch

Oct. 27, 2015

- 24 reads



The solar watch Espace Horloger, born on October 22, 2015, is a distillate of the Combiér region and watchmaking know-how. It's a perfectly useless object, and therefore absolutely indispensable. Furthermore, it doesn't cast anyone in the shade....



Joel Grandjean

Watchonista's Editor in Chief

The Espace Horloger is the only public watchmaking museum in Vaud, one of the largest cantons in Switzerland, and one of the most important, at least when you look at its northwestern tip, the cradle of Swiss watchmaking, including all mechanical complications. It's situated not far from the Ecole d'Horlogerie de la Vallée de Joux (Watchmaking School of the Joux Valley), a pedagogical hub of conscientiously conveyed knowhow that produced generations of watchmakers. Some were unknown, like those who conceived and built the Patek Philippe Henry Graves, considered the world's most complicated pocket watch, whose story is retold at the museum. Others, more notorious, have earned our infinite respect, like Philippe Dufour, master of the great vintages, and especially venerated by the realm of global connoisseurs.



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Genre de média: Internet
Type de média: Organisations spécialisées
UUpM: 185'568
Page Visits: 201'566

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N° de thème: 781.042
N° d'abonnement: 1089806



The solar equinoctial watch of l'Espace Horloger

Little big watch museum

Historical treasures are well cultivated around this building, whose history itself is quite impressive. It was once the property of Zenith, the leading brand in Le Locle, and then went over permanently to Jaeger-LeCoultre, the illustrious manufacture next door that keeps on gaining ground in the region. Indeed, both Jaeger-LeCoultre and Audemars Piguet at Le Brassus have their own museums, which are chock full of treasures. No doubt, their historical gems, exhibited in praise of their own brands, do offer some universal education to the visitor. In addition, if it would be possible to go search through the farms that clasp the sides of the valley, or to browse through the attics of the ancient homes of watchmakers, whose descendants have become mechanics, GPs, or insurance salesmen, one would surely find countless wonders.

In this rather stimulating environment, the Espace Horloger, devotes itself to history with a capital H, even if it means having to use some diplomacy occasionally, or proving that the place is properly insured. The museum has a genuine curator, Dave Grandjean, a historian with a passion for industrial heritage, whose own ancestors were genuine watchmakers, but they were foreigners, as it were, since they worked in the Val de Travers, between La Côte aux Féés and La Chaux-de-Fonds. The Espace Horloger is now in resonance with the three other major museums of Switzerland: the Château des Monts at Le Locle, the MIH at La Chaux-de-Fonds (the only international watchmaking museum in the world), and the body of works from Geneva, formerly known as the Museum of Enameling and Watchmaking of Geneva, which was swallowed up by the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire (Art and History Museum), renovated Jean Nouvel style. And it is also one of those key places of pilgrimage for acquiring horological knowledge and feeding one's passion for traditional values.



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The equinoctial solar watch

Vincent Jatton, the optimizer

The Espace Horloger owes its renaissance to the vision of one man, Vincent Jatton, whose attitude and urbane style seem to come from another planet. Just imagine this creative personality penetrating this hermetic space, inhabited by families and filled with ancient connivances! Imagine him beating a path in those thickets to settle in and take root! It's like a modern fable that even the most facetious author could not begin to write. Nevertheless, this man likes to get things going, it's obviously genetic. It's also written in the cache of his email addresses and the phrasing of his old business cards. Indeed, I myself remember him as the owner of the concepteur.ch domain and of one of his cards identified his professional services as: "Optimizer of ideas, project conception and management." It's all there. He raised funds, and continues doing so to wrap up the annual budget, he lit up the almost deserted corridors of the museum of tactile, modern, interactive technologies, and bit by bit he earned respect, listeners, followers. In short, he was adopted by the natives, and in return he gave them the flames of his enthusiasm and his disruptive approach.

Registered trademark, manufacturing starts

And suddenly, he got the idea of registering Espace Horloger as Class 14 intellectual property, which is the one that covers manufacturers in watchmaking. So, he actually turned into a de facto brand. No, he had no intention of infringing upon the prestigious logos in the neighborhood, even though the muse of history herself would have allowed him to manufacture watches stamped with the words "Espace Horloger," as was done back in the day. He just wanted to put a signature on objects that were sold in the shop, mark them with his own hand, and, why not, in places where the museum deserves better visibility.



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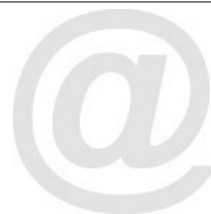
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The latitudes of the main cities were registered on the case

And now the threshold has been crossed, on October 22, 1015, on the day the fourth edition of the Chronometry Competition ended with the announcement of the results. Taking advantage of the presence of a gaggle of journalists and friendly – or just curious – people, Vincent Jaton raised the veil on a peculiar little device, but an ingenious one, manufactured out of wood from the Vallée de Joux. A portable sundial, which he called the solar watch, even though it isn't riddled with solar cells. Its accessibility in terms of price is only equal to the care and mastery applied during its production.

This timeless solar timepiece has the feel of solid local competencies: It was developed by the Espace Horloger, the furniture maker J. Bodenmann Ebénisterie, the watchmaker Philippe Dufour in a partnership with the Astroval association and the Ecole Technique de la Vallée de Joux (the local technical school). Besides the shadow that allows one to decipher an hour that is based on real time, the watch also displays its origins, since it is adjusted to latitude N46, 60°, Le Sentier, Espace Horloger.



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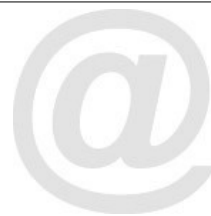


The horizontal model of the solar watch

Connected watch... to knowledge and the sun

This portable timepiece thumbs its nose at connected watches, because it is in direct contact with the great star, forever plugged into its light. While the sensors of the former will stop working, or fall victim to their planned obsolescence, this object will continue giving the time as long as the sun will be the sun. Furthermore, its pedagogical side gives us the chance to regain command of our time, in an era when time no longer belongs to us. Because when you are talking latitudes and when you realize that leaving the soil of the Vallée de Joux to go elsewhere means having to adjust your watch, you are also putting your finger in the great meshing of chronometric knowledge. Will that finger become an index finger pointing to a path of pure passion for horological complications? Whatever, it does force one to look into the notion of computation and hence, by extension, the problem of mean time and the equation of time. It forces one to talk of certain dates, like April 16, June 14, September 2 and December 25, the only four days of the year when solar time – the only true time – is the same as mean time.

In short, barring the fact that the first solar watch also embodies the other ancient know-how of the Vallée de Joux, namely the art of woodworking, one could honestly say, it will be difficult to resist such a piece. Its price, which still needs confirmation, is about 100 Swiss francs for the horizontal version and a little over 300 Swiss francs for the equinox version. Both models are of viburnum wood, with a natural varnish. The one model is calibrated to the Vallée de Joux, while the other one boasts a compass and a bubble level and parts made of brass, and it can be regulated according to one's latitude thanks to its tilting dial. And while it is available online - info@espacehorloger.ch - it would be a shame to miss a detour to the museum for actually picking up the watch and a lesson in how to adjust it. It is well worth the visit, for both the museum and for a memorable experience.



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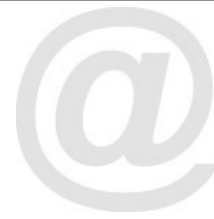
Espace Horloger: <http://www.espacehorloger.ch>

J. Bodenmann Ebénisterie: <http://www.bodenmann.ch>

Association Astroval: <http://www.astroval.ch>

Ecole Technique de la Vallée de Joux: <http://www.vd.ch/etablissements-de-formation/ecole-technique-de-la-vallee-de-joux/>





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