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THE FANTASTIC *complications* OF CHRISTOPHE CLARET

In a 19th-century manor, high in the Neuchâtel mountains of Switzerland, Christophe Claret, with the help of a robot and 65 staff, makes impossible watchmaking dreams a reality.

WORDS · LISA SMYTH

While many people could mistake the Federation of Haute Horology (FHH) as something JK Rowling dreamed up for the *Harry Potter* universe, if you have a passing interest in luxury timepieces and a spare US\$140,000 (until recently the starting price for a Christophe Claret watch), you will know that this Swiss institution is the guardian of fine watchmaking.

In 2017, for the first time, FHH released a 'white paper' naming the 64 watchmaking brands from around the globe that met their rigorous standards and could hold the title of 'Fine Watchmaking' companies. To no-one's surprise, the independent Christophe Claret brand made the cut.

Christophe Claret, the man, enrolled in the oldest watchmaking school in Switzerland at the age of 16 and has spent the past 30 years producing some of the most complex watch movements in the industry for his high-end clients and, starting in 2009, his own brand.

Revered for his fantastic complications, this is the man who has created a series of timepieces that allows owners to play poker, baccarat and blackjack on their watches – his gaming collection.

Using state-of-the-art robotics and centuries-old techniques, Claret creates just 100 timepieces a year under his own brand. *The CEO Magazine* asks him how his incredible ideas make it from his head to the wrists of some of the most famous and powerful people in the world.



You have spoken about your passion for the Renaissance period – what is it about this time that so appeals to you?

I would love to have been born during the Italian Renaissance, a period I appreciate as much for its history as for its aesthetics, its artistic refinement and intellectual thought. I make no secret of this and some of my collections vividly portray this taste for ornamentation and classicism.

What are the hallmarks of a Claret watch?

Extreme innovation, quality and rarity.

What are the steps in creating a Claret watch?

Once the concept is established, we work on the aesthetics and graphic views, and then we realise the design using 3D software, before production and assembly. However, one particularity of our brand is that we make our own animated films describing our watch movements. An average five months is necessary to produce two minutes of film. This step is very important to better understand the complexity of the watch and appreciate its aesthetics through music and images.

How many skills or professions are involved in this process?

There is a total of 31 different skills at the Claret Manufacture – 80 per cent of the watch components are produced in-house. Regarding design, we have engineers and design watchmakers. Our watchmakers have very advanced training (seven years on average) plus additional training at the Manufacture for between six months and two years, depending on the watches they work on. Generally, most of our staff have finished first in their respective classes.

What makes your latest collection unique?

The watches in the collection I presented at this year's Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie, called Maestro Mamba

[pictured below], were inspired by the jungle. The purpose was to represent its extreme beauty but also its danger, which is depicted by a snake, the mamba.

Thus, the watch is totally black with elements in green such as stones, some steel elements and, of course, the snake that goes through the movement of the watch.

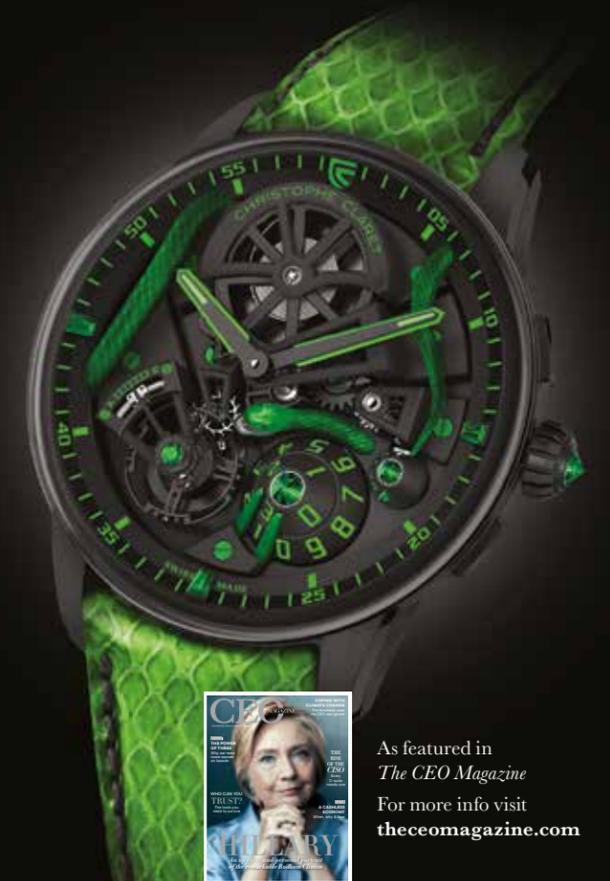
Given our move to a digital world, why do you think fine watches are still so sought after?

Our customers look for watches with volume and mechanical consistency. There are only a few of these. We work in a very niche market, on the top of the pyramid.

However, I have no doubt that many people are looking for simplicity and thin watches. Combining thinness and sophisticated mechanical movements is a very hard job.

What advice would you give to a collector just starting out?

The first piece of advice I would give them is to be well informed about the value of watches today and to focus primarily on independent brands that make creative, original and exclusive watches, because they will always be a good investment and of great personal satisfaction. ■



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