



VINCENT KAUFFMANN & CHRISTIAN SELMONI

DESIGN MANAGER AND
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT
DIRECTOR, VACHERON
CONSTANTIN

THE REVISIONISTS

BY WEI KOH

It's not so much a revolution but an evolution — one that's definitely beginning to emerge as a powerful and consolidated creative vision.

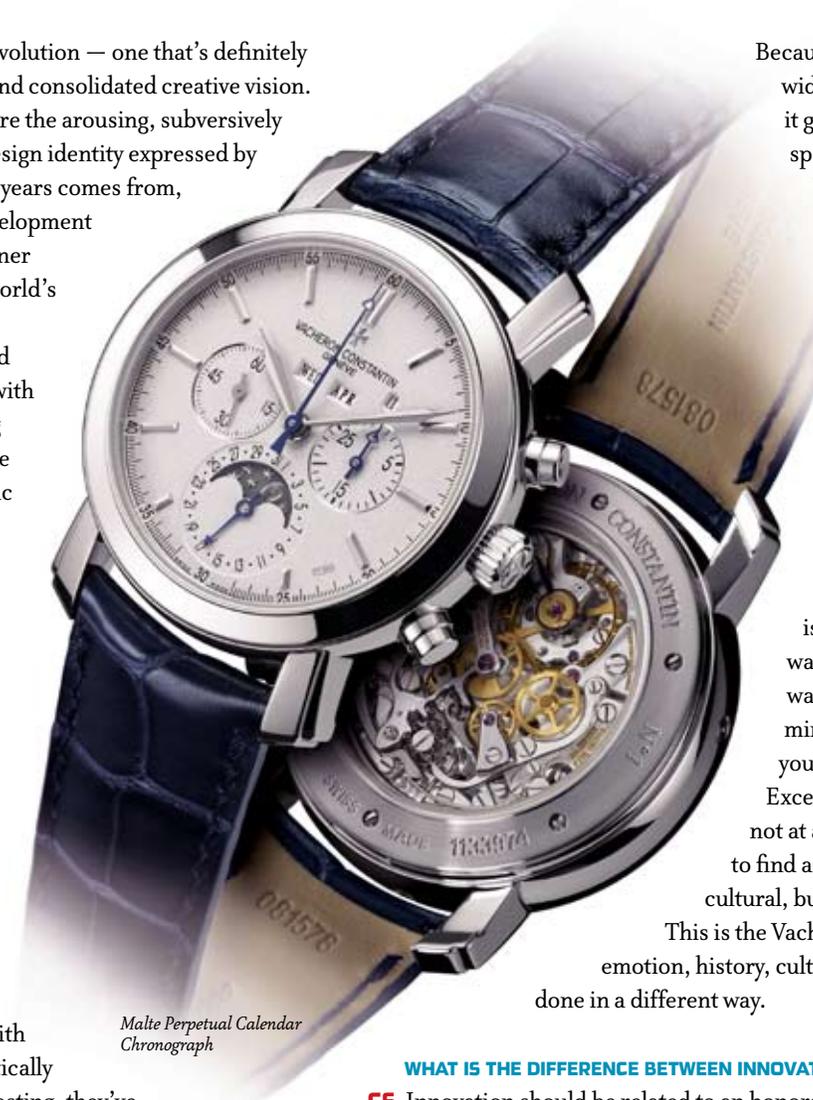
If you've been wondering about where the arousing, subversively playful and purposefully pure sense of design identity expressed by Vacheron Constantin over the past three years comes from, look no further. The brand's product development head Christian Selmoni and its top designer Vincent Kauffmann have propelled the world's oldest manufacture into a true art house.

Together, they've merged sculpture and time-telling to create expressive poetry with Les Masques, the most artistically daring collection of timepieces of the year. At the same time, they've channeled the dynamic timelessness of their manufacture into stunning, ultra-somber, totally Zen watches in their Platinum Excellence Collection — a series of monochrome timepieces that are so restrained that they are horologically equivalent to Suprematist Kasimir Malevich's artworks. Rather than succumb to the trend for festooning contemporary watches with a litany of "performance" materials, Selmoni and Kauffmann's approach has been to use the traditional language of their métier to create astonishing works, with one foot in the present and one foot in the past. By combining perfect perlage with black nickel bridges, they've created erotically modern finishes; by using micro-sandblasting, they've infected their dials with a sense of industrial engineering; and by replacing the normal floral motif of skeleton work with a motif of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, they've connected this traditional craft with the modern world. It is our pleasure to break creative bread with these two singularly talented modern creators...

HOW DO YOU INNOVATE IN A BRAND THAT HAS A FORCEFULLY CLASSICAL IDENTITY?

CS It is important that all the product design and product development teams work from a position where we respect the brand's heritage. Vacheron Constantin used to be a somewhat dusty brand, but now, I think we are becoming much more innovative. Our DNA is related to classical high watchmaking techniques, and this is something that we want to showcase. The question is how we could showcase this while capturing people's imagination. Innovation should never be for marketing reasons, but to continue to write the history of your brand...

VK It's interesting because Vacheron Constantin has one of the longest histories of any manufacture, and sometimes people ask: "Does this inhibit creativity?" I feel that, quite the contrary, it enables great creativity.



Malte Perpetual Calendar Chronograph

Because we've covered such a wide scope in watchmaking, it gives us a lot of artistic space to express ourselves.

What is the connective thread for a Vacheron Constantin watch? It

must be cultural and relate to the history of human culture. We must guard certain classicism but, at the same time, we can do new things. I'll give you an example: We like to go against the trends, so while, today, everyone is making very loud, brash watches that shout, we want to make subversive, minimalist watches like you see in our Platinum Excellence Collection. We are not at all into fashion, so we have to find a different voice; a mature, cultural, but also exciting, voice.

This is the Vacheron Constantin way: emotion, history, culture and innovation, but done in a different way.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INNOVATION AND FASHION?

CS Innovation should be related to an honorable quest for excellence; it is something that you must always pursue. Fashion is something that is very subject to changes. Our brand is less fashion-oriented, but it is creative-oriented.

VK Innovation is expressed by watches that bring something new to horology, but never in an opportunistic way, never in an ephemeral way. I think that we need to put a different face on watches, but one that is never artificial. You must go deeper into the watch to find treatments, details, to create emotions. There is no detail in watchmaking that has been pursued to its conclusion, so there are so many expressive possibilities.

HOW DID YOU BEGIN IN VACHERON CONSTANTIN?

VK I was a jeweler and I had a lot of interest in watches because they have an aspect about them that is living. So, I had the opportunity to enter into Vacheron Constantin in 1999. Although I love to design, initially, I was working in logistics. Then, one day, when the product development team was in the midst of updating our Overseas model, our CEO Mr. Torres approached me and said, "I hear you are good with a pencil." From there, he gave me the incredible opportunity to work on the redesign of one of our most iconic watches... it was an incredible experience.



Patrimony Contemporaine Self-Winding

THECREATORS

CS My family consists of watchmakers from the Vallée de Joux, but I have no skill with my hands. So much so that when there is something to be fixed at home, my wife asks me: “Are you sure you want to do that?” I was working in Geneva in a finance company. There, I met some friends who were working in the Vallée de Joux and had the opportunity to join the company. So, I resigned from finance and joined Vacheron Constantin. I became a production manager. Then, my dream came true: I had a discussion with our CEO and explained that I would love to create the product development team. He gave us the green light and we moved out of the factory, set up a small office and we began to design and prototype watches.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE FIRST WATCHES YOU WORKED ON, AND WHICH WATCH ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

CS The very first watches we began working on were the *Égérie* and the *Overseas*; then, suddenly on the horizon was the manufacturer’s 250th anniversary. We were in the midst of setting up the office while also designing the watches for this massive celebration. For me, the first significant work we did was the 247 with the open work dial and retrograde date. It was something really beautiful. Also, the *Patrimony* 40 mm simple watch was something really elegant.

VK I agree with the 40 mm *Patrimony*; it is a piece that will last. You’d be amazed by how difficult it is to create a simple, pure piece.

WHAT DISTINGUISHES A SUCCESSFULLY DESIGNED WATCH FROM AN UNSUCCESSFUL ONE?

VK Ideally, a watch needs to bring balance and equilibrium. This is never the result of a single detail. When you first see a watch, you are never sure precisely why it appeals to you, because it has to do with balance, proportion and thinness in the right places. Then, there is the preciousness of the human craft imparted to it.

A timepiece should have a personality. The *Platinum Excellence Patrimony* looks exquisite on both men and women. It is as if the soul of the watch connects with the soul of the person wearing it. I think the best watchmaking is not just about technical achievement or even the finish, but in every aspect of the watch. This is interrelated with a watch’s ability to elicit emotion.

What was a watch created for initially? To tell time. This is why you have minute repeaters to give you the time in the dark. But what is the minute repeater good for today? Nothing except to create emotion, and this is the most important thing of all. This is what we hope to foster. This is how we nourish the human spirit. ★



Malte Tonneau Regulator Tourbillon