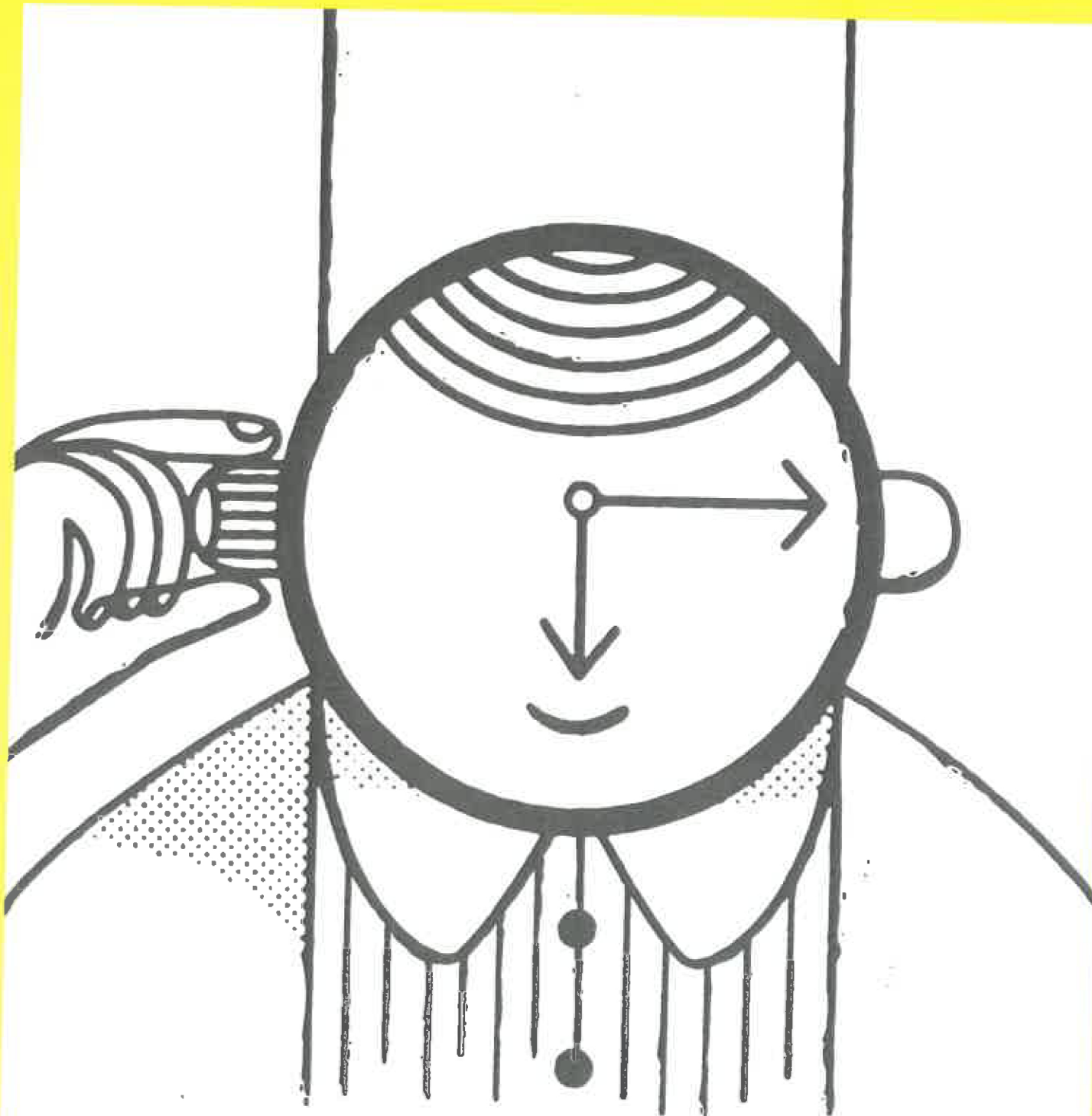


BRUMMELL

Horology autumn 2016

The little black book for the City



Face time

Conversations with watchmakers, creators and innovators • Handsome, handmade horology
Women's watches for the golden hours • Stylishly sporty men's timepieces • Hands up for bronze

30 Beaumonde • Ultra-technical

Prime time

Greubel Forsey proves that, when it comes to the rarest, most complex watchmaking, a training in Swiss horology can move mountains



Words: Richard Holt

Watchmaker Stephen Forsey is one half of Greubel Forsey, which makes audacious, ultra-technical timepieces that are stretching the limits of what can be achieved in the field of haute horology. The watches – characterised by exquisitely finished tourbillon movements – are also incredibly rare, with only around 100 being produced every year.

Forsey, who founded the company in 2004 with fellow watchmaker Robert Greubel, is British, but he has been living in Switzerland long enough for his English to be decorated with the occasional, barely noticeable non-native inflection.

After training in London in the 1980s, Forsey worked for five years as a watch restorer at the luxury house Asprey. However, during that period, he was already feeling the pull of the Swiss mountains, twice taking time out from work in Britain to sharpen his craft with further courses in the horology hub of Neuchâtel. Then, in 1992, he made the move permanent, relocating to Le Locle to work on the most sophisticated complications, such as minute repeaters. This is where he met Greubel, and together they started kicking around ideas about going into business together. In 1999, they formed the research and development firm CompliTime and took on projects for a number of different watch houses.

Nonetheless, the desire to create something themselves was compelling, so the pair began working on their own timepieces. 'It took us four and a half years to build our first piece, the Double Tourbillon 30°,' says Forsey. 'It was fantastically difficult to do because we had very limited resources. But we were lucky that, in 2004, what we had been working on was finally ready to launch.' They were pleased to find a very receptive public and, within a few days, had 'an order book far in excess of our expectations'.

Each watch takes eight to nine months to build. Despite the huge amount of delicate work that goes into every one, Forsey is keen to demonstrate how durable they are. He repeatedly raps the one on his wrist firmly with a knuckle, showing that wearing a piece of fine watchmaking doesn't mean having to spend your time worrying about fragile machinery.

Forsey has independent confirmation of this. The first Greubel Forsey watch was entered into the International Chronometry Competition in 2011, which Forsey describes as 'like the Le Mans



From top Vision in red gold; Stephen Forsey; Double Balancier in white gold; Equation of Time in white gold, and its reverse side



24 Hours for mechanical watches'. It involved a series of exacting accuracy tests carried out under conditions of extreme temperature, shock and magnetic-field exposure, and won in the tourbillon category, with a score that has yet to be beaten. Other accolades include the Gafa Award, from the International Museum of Horology in La Chaux-de-Fonds, and two wins in the Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève – watchmaking's Oscars.

CompliTime and Greubel Forsey together employ around 100 people in La Chaux-de-Fonds. Despite customers clamouring to get their hands on one of his watches, Forsey says the number of pieces they will make is limited by the extremely specialised production process. 'It's very small and very bespoke,' he says. 'Maybe one day we'll be able to make 150, maybe even 200 watches a year. But it takes a long time to put together all the techniques.' That's all to the good, because it means, no matter how many people fall in love with the brand, rarity is guaranteed.

greubelforsey.com