

Decimal *Points*

Kari Voutilainen's unusual minute repeater sounds the hours, the ten-minute intervals and then the exact minutes



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Using traditional methods, master case maker Gideon Levingston takes one month to hand craft Voutilainen's case.



BY CURTIS
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There are watchmakers today who are craftsmen, but do not innovate, and then there are those who innovate, but only in theory and with computers. They often leave the actual crafting for others to do. In addition, there are those who innovate and craft strictly for function and not art.

This is quite normal. We don't usually find, nor expect, one watchmaker to have all of these qualities. To have one is frequently all it takes to be elevated above the ranks of normal watchmaker. To have all three is, well, quite rare indeed.

Kari Voutilainen, the Finnish watchmaker who has made Switzerland his home for over a decade, is that rare breed of watchmaker who embodies craftsmanship, innovation and artistry in his work. He has been doing this for some time now in private for collectors

and within the industry. Last year he made his first public appearance at BaselWorld 2005, as a candidate-member of the AHCI.

The watch he exhibited was Masterpiece No. 6, which is a decimal repeater (a world first) with up/down indicator. This year, he is moving to the next decimal.

Next masterpiece

Less than a year later, he is ready with Masterpiece No. 7. As with No. 6, MP7 is a decimal repeater, which

means, unlike the standard minute repeaters that divide the time in quarter intervals, Voutilainen's Decimal Repeater sounds the hours, the ten-minute intervals and then the exact minutes. Here, instead of a power-reserve indicator as was seen in Number 6, he has incorporated a second time-zone indication.

Always searching for ways to make his work unique and simple to use, Voutilainen decided to indicate the second time zone with jumping hours, and furthermore, he devised

- ▲ Engraved "Voutilainen No. 7," (also seen on the dial) the Decimal Repeater
- ▲ Caliber is manufactured and finished to the highest standards.



- ▲ In the cadran, or under-dial work, note the minute snail, which is unique to this
- ▲ caliber. It has six lobes and nine steps each instead of the typical minute snail that has four lobes and fourteen steps.

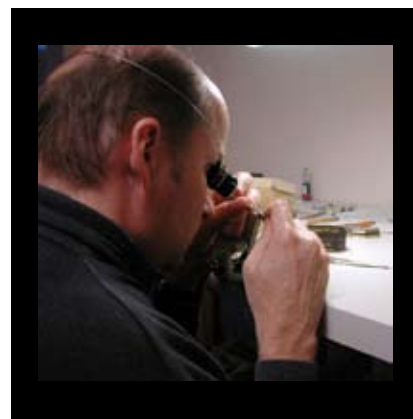
a method (inspired by the designs of A.L. Breguet) of activating that second time zone by pressing down on the crown. This advances the second time zone hour hand ahead one hour.

This new watch movement is based on a LeCoultre minute repeating ebauche (MP6 was based on a Louis Audemars ebauche) and has thirty-nine hours of power reserve, with its free-sprung balance vibrating at a pleasing 18,000 bph.

The ebauche goes through quite the renovation by Voutilainen, with easily over a hundred parts being required to complete the watch's manufacturing. What is in it? Here is a partial list: the components for the decimal part of the repeater (the snails for the minutes and tens, the "surprise" piece, canon pinion, cen-

ter wheel and pinion, minute and tens racks, hook for the minute rack, barrel bridge, modification of hour star, with new bridge made for it); the stainless steel balance with its 18-karat gold weights and timing screws that remind us of marine chronometers; and the uniquely designed hair-spring stud, which is placed behind the balance cock's jewel.

While the stud's placement doesn't add any performance benefit, it does aid the general aesthetic, says Voutilainen, who adds that it ups the ante for craftsmanship. The steel stud is filed square, tapped, and is then fitted into a square hole he has made in the balance cock. In this way there isn't any turning of the stud when tightening the screw from above—a nice touch.



- ▲ Voutilainen bevels the minute rack
- ▲ hook he recently made.

Handmade hand

And, if that isn't enough, Voutilainen makes by hand in his atelier all of the components for the second time zone and the jumping hours.

He finishes the completed movement to a standard that few others can approach. This is not to say that others don't apply perlage to their plates, adorn their bridges with Geneva waves, polish their oil sinks, straight-grain their flanks and polish their bevels. But few, to this fellow watchmaker's eye, do it as nicely or as consistently as Voutilainen.

Similarly, all of the steel parts have a matte, straight-grained or mirror finish on their top surfaces, with their flanks straight-grained and their bevels polished. And, of course, all are finished to his extremely high standards. Regardless of the origin of the ebauche (LeCoultre or Louis Audemars), the end result is all Voutilainen.

The watch's 18-karat white gold case, with teardrop lugs, is hand crafted by a master case maker and measures 39.50mm in diameter. The hinged caseback is hand-engraved by master engraver Eddy Jaquet. At the instructions of the watch's owner, he has carved the Greek myth of the Pleiades—the seven daughters of



▲ The Seven Daughters of Atlas design on the back is completely hand engraved. All of Voutilainen's work may be personalized.

Atlas, whom Zeus removed from earth and placed into the sky to escape the advances of Orion the Hunter.

The dial is 18-karat gold, engine-turned, finished in white eggshell with applied numerals. The second time zone has day and night indications hand engraved in 18-karat yellow and white gold. Voutilainen makes the hands himself out of gold and then has them plated in a black galvanic color, save the second time zone hour hand, which remains unplated gold. The “caps” that are friction fitted to the hands are turned from steel and blued over a flame.

A full series

Voutilainen plans a series of five Masterpieces, ranging from MP6 to MP10. All are based on his Decimal Minute Repeater caliber, with each having a different additional complication.

Also, each watch may be personalized to the purchaser's own wishes. It is Voutilainen's wish to keep his production limited to small series and unique pieces, thus allowing him the time to develop many different types of ideas, which he enjoys immensely.

“I feel I can be much more creative like this, and that is what I like,” he says.

As an aside, but keeping in step with his classical watchmaking philosophy, Kari Voutilainen is a co-founder of the new watchmaking alliance called TimeAeon (see International Watch, April 2006), with Philippe Dufour, Vianney Halter, Robert Greubel and Stephen Forsey. In addition, Voutilainen debuted a new watch last month during BaselWorld. Stay tuned for details. ☺

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