

HAVING IT ALL

WATCHMAKING
JOINS JEWELRY
MAKING IN THE
FOREFRONT
AT CARTIER

BY KEITH W. STRANDBERG

Cartier manufacture in
La Chaux-de-Fonds

Cartier is one of the most famous brands in the world. You'd be hard pressed to find anyone who hasn't heard the Cartier name. On the other hand, relatively few associate Cartier with high watchmaking. The powers that be at Cartier are out to change that.

THE MECHANICS

This new direction for Cartier comes from the top, the very top, as in Bernard Fornas, president and CEO of Cartier International. In a way, Fornas wants it all—he wants Cartier to be a force in high watchmaking without abandoning its position as a design house. “We are based on design and beauty; at the same time, we can be a watchmaker with the right movements, the right complications and the right precision,” he details.

The decision was a reflection of Fornas' love of watches. “I love both the design and mechanics,” he says. “I don't want just one side, I want both sides, especially for men's watches. In a car, you want both the right design and the right engine. I made the decision three or four years ago to have Cartier engines inside Cartier watches. I want my customers to buy Cartier for the design and for the mechanics.”



Bernard Fornas, president and CEO, Cartier International

quite new is that we now want to be involved in the development and manufacture of movements. It has meant lots of investment."

THE FACILITY

The new facility, an expansion of the existing building in La Chaux-de-Fonds, is the result of a state-of-the-art, spare-no-expense approach. Not only has Cartier worked to master watchmaking, it has also recruited creative people to find innovative ways to produce new watches. In that sense, there is a bit of a startup spirit at work at Cartier. "I am very happy that we are moving in the direction of high horology, it's exciting for us," says Minion. "The goal is

Astrotourbillon, for example, the aim was to make a tourbillon but to do it differently. I love the Santos 100 Skeleton because it is a whole, the movement was designed for the case and expresses the DNA of Cartier. We didn't just force a movement into the case; everything was built specifically for this watch. We couldn't have made this watch 10 years ago, we might have dreamed of it, but we couldn't have made it."

Now that it has the means to make the watches it conceives of, Cartier is showing what it can do. One example of the Cartier team stretching its creative and technological muscles is the ID One concept, introduced in 2010. With an escapement mounted on shock-absorbing blocks and regulating components built from materials unaffected by thermal variations and magnetic fields, the ID One never needs adjusting.

With its rich history and global name recognition, Cartier could easily choose to rest on its laurels, but that wouldn't be Fornas' style. "I like to build something during the day," Fornas says. "I was born to build, and that's what drives me every day—I think it's the most important thing a person can do."

Fornas photo by Philippe Poivre © Cartier 2009

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—Emmanuel Perrin, Cartier NA

Employees have welcomed the change. "I have been with the manufacture since 1997, and in that time, we have moved from being a jewelry brand that made watches to being a real watch manufacture," says Edouard Minion, director of horlogerie product development, Cartier International. "The real turning point was when Mr. Fornas decided to start manufacturing movements. We always had nice watches, but we were mainly a producer of quartz movements, cases and bracelets. We had to enter high watchmaking. And to develop something new, we needed to have the knowledge internally; we needed to master the know-how. We hired a director of haute horlogerie movement development, constructors, developers and then acquired the means to make the movements."

The investment was a quantum leap for Cartier, since the company had to build this part of its business from scratch. "I believe we are entering a new era for Cartier," says Hélène Poulit-Duquesne, international marketing director, Cartier. "The foundation is the same, in particular the way we produce watches and the focus on quality. What is

to be creative. If we make a complication, we want to make it the Cartier way. We don't want to be innovative just to be innovative, we want to integrate the DNA of Cartier throughout the watch. With the Rotonde

ORGANIC GROWTH

The change in reputation from "jeweler" to "jeweler and master watchmaker" won't happen overnight, and the people at Cartier know this, but they also believe it is an achievable goal. "This is a new position for Cartier," admits Emmanuel Perrin, president and CEO at Cartier NA. "In ladies' watches, we are the leader; in jewelry, we are the leader; but in high watchmaking, we are a challenger. We have to see how collectors and watch lovers are going to accept the Cartier fine watchmaking models, and we are having some success, but it will certainly take time." That's alright. As one of the world's most famous names, Cartier can afford to be patient and let its watchmaking reputation grow organically.



Rotonde de Cartier skeleton flying tourbillon in white gold with Caliber 9455 MC

Photo by Franck Dieleman © Cartier 2010