

VACHERON CONSTANTIN :

A QUARTER OF A MILLENNIUM OF EMINENCE AND EXCELLENCE

Vacheron Constantin celebrates its 250th anniversary in 2005. It is in fact the world's oldest watch Manufacture to have enjoyed uninterrupted activity since its founding in 1755.

A full-fledged watch Manufacture, it masters the complete creative process, ranging from research and development of movements, the aesthetic definition of each of its models, the full set of stages in designing and making the watch components, through to entirely hand-crafted finishing.

It was in 1755 that a brilliant master-watchmaker named Jean-Marc Vacheron opened his workshop in the heart of Geneva. An open-minded and scholarly individual inspired by the humanist current of thought, this "cabinotier" – as the Geneva watchmaking craftsmen were called at the time – soon began making exceptionally finely fashioned watches that were to earn a reputation that spread well beyond national borders. He was to transmit his talent, his knowledge and his sense of excellence to numerous generations of his descendents.

A seasoned businessman and a peerless salesman, François Constantin joined forces with the heirs of Jean-Marc Vacheron in 1819. Displaying tremendous energy, he travelled the length and breadth of Europe for decades, opening up numerous markets to the marvels of ingenuity emerging from the workshops of a House now called Vacheron et Constantin.

In 1839, the history of watchmaking and that of the company were marked by the hiring of a brilliant technical director, Georges-Auguste Leschot. This inventive, visionary engineer developed and produced the first machines enabling series production of movement components, and in particular a device called the pantograph. Until then, no constituent part could be substituted for another, given the inevitable irregularities of their entirely hand-made production. By associating the machine with the human hand, Vacheron Constantin revolutionised production, enabling a considerable acceleration in the marketing of watch products.

In 1880, Vacheron Constantin registered the brand's "Maltese Cross" symbol. It is in fact based on a small component of the barrel-cover, which was formerly used to limit the extent to which the mainspring could be wound, thus enhancing the rate of the watch.

Throughout the 20th century, Vacheron Constantin has pursued its in-depth exploration of its art through stunning creations intended for an increasingly large number of clients. Year after year, Vacheron Constantin reinforces its reputation based on its know-how and on its sense of technical and aesthetic innovation.

THREE KEY FACTORS

From the 18th century to the 21st century, the spirit and the letter have remained intact. Today as yesterday, creations by Vacheron Constantin stem from the encounter of three key factors:

Technique. Vacheron Constantin combines age-old know-how and ultra-modern equipment to produce ever more sophisticated timepieces. The brand thus offers an entire range of movements, from the simplest – indicating the hour, minutes and seconds – to the most complex, such as the perpetual calendar, chronographs, moon-phase or jumping-hour models and tourbillons, and on to extremely clever minute repeaters. Today, 85% of its watches are equipped with a mechanical movement.

Aesthetics. As the world's oldest watch Manufacture, Vacheron Constantin has never stopped creating and innovating. Drawing its inspiration from an existing wealth of successes and from its own traditions of excellence, it is able to create watches with exemplary lines and volumes, in harmony with the most authentic contemporary spirit. Down through changing eras, the shapes and decorative motifs are consistently aimed at achieving a universal, timelessly refined aesthetic appeal that is never ostentatious.

Finishing. The finishing testifies to the efforts expended on technical and aesthetic levels to give exceptional value to each watch emerging from the workshops. It is the care devoted to each detail that makes a Vacheron Constantin so clearly recognisable to connoisseurs. This quest for perfection constitutes the genuine signature, invisible yet very real, of the master-watchmakers of the House.

QUALITY AND ADDED VALUE

Vacheron Constantin currently employs around 350 people around the world, including 250 in Switzerland. It runs two production sites with complementary activities: the new site in Plan-les-Ouates/Geneva, a contemporary Manufacture and international brand headquarters that have been operational since August 2004; and the other in the Vallée de Joux, which is home to the movement Research and Development unit and to the machining and decorating of the components in mechanical movements. Together, they produce a limited number of exceptional watches with high added value: some 15,000 per year, a figure that obviously favours quality over any other considerations. In addition to developing and crafting all its "complication" models, Vacheron Constantin also decorates all its proprietary movements: bevelling the bridges, drawing out the flanks with file strokes, and individually polishing the screws are all part of the operations consistently performed before the meticulous process of assembling the parts one by one.