

EMMANUEL BOUCHET

SLOW-MOTION TIME

BY PIERRE MAILLARD

Chasing after time is one of the chronic illnesses of today. Learning to slow down time can only be beneficial. So says master watchmaker Emmanuel Bouchet who, armed with a wealth of experience, in 2014 finally launched his own unique brand.

The stretch of land that arches across the Jura valleys on either side of the French-Swiss border is watchmaking country and Emmanuel Bouchet is the perfect representation of it. "I feel completely French and completely Swiss," he tells us. He was born in 1963 in Maîche, in the Doubs region of eastern France. His family's roots sink deep in what was a stronghold of the French watch industry. "There was everything," he says, meaning everything watch-related. His great-uncles manufactured cases. His father repaired complications, in addition to restoration work. At 21, after studying at Morteau's watchmaking school, he took over his father's business and "I haven't stopped since. My motivation is the same today as when I started," he declares, a smile tugging at his lips. Supported by a staff of six, he worked on watches as well as jewellery and gem-setting, but after 16 years wanted to experience what he calls *la grande horlogerie suisse* and in 1999 joined Jaeger-LeCoultre, where his suggestions for the Reverso Retrograde Perpetual Calendar earned him a place in the Grandes Complications department. He stayed for three years then, after an eleven-month stint at Frédéric Piguet, took bag and baggage to Parmigiani. "Some watchmakers have a gift for visualising exactly how a mechanism will function. I'm one of them," he tells us, matter-of-factly. "At Parmigiani, I went over the entire functioning of their perpetual calendar in my head and a couple of months later we were good to go." At the head of the complications laboratory, he worked on the Bugatti, a uniquely tubular-shaped watch, as well as the 30-second Tourbillon, among other projects.

A multi-competency structure

Still eager to grow his knowledge and his expertise, in 2008 Emmanuel Bouchet left Parmigiani and set up Centagora (described by *Europa Star* in 2012 as "a new type of watchmaking coach") alongside a micro-engineer, a mechanical engineer and watch repairer, and an IT and business engineer, joined shortly after by a project engineer and a project manager. This

multi-competency structure provides design and development services, consulting, coaching, technical analysis, training, outsourcing and co-innovation, as well as assembly and casing for small special series or particularly complex timepieces. One eloquent example of the work coming out of Centagora is the Harry Winston Opus 12 (2012) with its novel orbital display. Once again, though, Emmanuel Bouchet had an itch to scratch.



| Europa Star 2004



| Harry Winston Opus 12



MaClef, independence beckons

Two years after the Opus 12, in 2014 he said goodbye to Centagora and launched Emmanuel Bouchet Architecture Mécanique as a vehicle for his own projects. He also set up MaClef (taking letters from his name and those of his wife and children), serving third parties. His motivation, his ultimate objective: "to make a living to then make my own watch".

A fast-growing concern, MaClef designs and builds automatic and manual movements (and, increasingly, external parts), with Vaucher as its benchmark for quality. Recent production includes a micro-rotor which can be "adapted to clients' requirements" and is designed to integrate complications without additional modules... although these are something MaClef can supply, including modules for a date display, moon phases, perpetual calendar, annual calendar as well as sidereal time.

Emmanuel Bouchet put his dream of making watches under his own name on hold until 2024. In the interim, he signed several unique pieces but admits that this was "hard work." Hard to keep MaClef growing — the company employs 15 people (and is looking to recruit), with an engineering design bureau, three movement constructors, a machinist-prototypist, two watchmakers, a project manager, admin and marketing — while conceptualising, making and marketing his own ideas. Until he finally felt ready to make what he calls his "comeback". Meaning express himself on his own terms and build a brand. Make his singular mark.





A fleeting intuition to slow down time

"I was out driving one day when I heard a voice on the radio say Life is no more than a day, a passing hour, an instant that fades and vanishes," he tells us. "That would be the beginning or re-beginning of it all. Whereas five minutes earlier the thought hadn't even entered my head, there and then my decision was made. It was time to launch my own brand once and for all. I knew what I wanted to do. Everything began at that instant, it all springs from there. If life is just a fleeting hour, a minute, the briefest second then we must slow down time so we might better contemplate the moment. By slowing down, we can see beauty. Slowing down lets us zoom in on a detail that we miss at full speed. So, logically, I decided I would slow down the mechanical instants of my movements." The watchmaker's paradox. Having chased after time, which is always one step ahead, he now wanted to slow down time, grasp it.

A philosophical, even spiritual intention which, being the watchmaker he is, he now had to transcribe with metal wheels.

Complication One: deconstruct time

This is where the brain takes over and the watchmaker must form a mental image of his complex mechanism and picture its workings in his head. Before he can even contemplate making it real.

To slow down time is to deconstruct time. To separate hour, minute and second so as to focus on one or the other. A regulator movement. Not exactly. Rather, each timekeeping element is itself deconstructed. Hours, nothing but hours, are given on a dial at 8 o'clock while a dial at 4 o'clock shows minutes by means of two hands. One for units and the other for tens, the latter a retrograde hand that instantly jumps to zero at 59 minutes and 60 seconds. A deconstruction deconstructed. However, and this is where time starts to really slow down, the seconds dial at 12 o'clock (a rare thing in itself) incorporates a day/night indication: the smallest and largest measurement of time combined.

Prominent at 6 o'clock, the escapement on the dial side, which regulates the hours and minutes, beats once every 15 seconds. Specifically, a lever positioned between the fork and the escapement transmits its force to the movement, creating a

The *Complication One* collection is so far made up of two models: the *Complication One Aleph*, with its multi-level dial comprised of sapphire discs that seem to float in space, and the *Complication One Contrast* with its dial base available in Onyx or other hard stones, or ceramic. Both are powered by the Manufacture caliber EB63E, a mechanical hand-wound movement composed of 339 parts developed exclusively for these timepieces and entirely made at Emmanuel Bouchet's workshop.



pause in time. A moment, however brief, during which time no longer exists. In contrast, the escapement on the movement side, which regulates the seconds, beats at its usual rate.

A timekeeper – quite literally – that is both philosophical and technically sophisticated, this Complication One is currently offered as two iterations: Aleph in rose gold, platinum or titanium with a white, black onyx or hand-lacquered dial, and Contrast in white gold, 4N rose gold, platinum or black ADLC-coated titanium with a dial in onyx, a choice of other hardstones or ceramic.

Soon to follow, the Complication One Fusion will reveal itself entirely, to fully experience the mechanism of this mysterious time that slows every 15 seconds.

The next chapters

And there is more. Emmanuel Bouchet will officially launch his brand at Geneva Watch Days (September 4-7, 2025) with another, very different "deconstruction of time" which we are not at liberty to reveal. All we can say is that this new movement will inspire some unexpected and poetic temporal "animations". Already, another watch is planned for 2026. We can imagine that the enigmatic Contemplation – its name – will offer a time and space conducive to meditation. ♦