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HYT TECHNOLOGIES PART 1: CREATION AND LAUNCH OF THE PROJECT


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Hydro Mechanical Horologists present the unthinkable: using liquid in a mechanical watch to display the time. This is a huge challenge in terms of design and production.

MARCO GABELLA
Watchonista Co-Founder

Let's go back to a human, watchmaking and scientific adventure. HYT was the buzzword at BaselWorld 2012. The promised anti-conformist achievement fascinated all attendees. This story could thus easily start with the famous: "I have a dream...". Come to think of it, when Lucien Vuillamoz had the idea of designing a water watch in 2002, his concept was far from being feasible and was more fictitious than real. Consequently, its actual design and production intum were a real challenge.




HYT H1

From intention to design

It was the very site of the Swiss national exposition - in the Three-Lakes region; i.e. Neuchâtel, Bienne and Morat - that inspired its creator to think up the water watch. Here, we experience a sort of historical flashback to the time of water clocks and the extreme mistrust of watchmakers of the aquatic element, which remains public enemy number 1 of mechanical timepieces prone to rust.


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The concept seemed hard to materialize and remained just an intention for a long time. Years went by but Lucien Vuillamoz could never get this vision out of his mind. His way of thinking about the project evolved and thus the concept HYT are now presenting - displaying the passing of time through liquid - has slowly taken shape.



HYT fluid module

This new approach quickly adopted the functional principles of the fluidic HYT indicator. The two supple metallic bellows are very thinly linked by a capillary. Each of the flexible chambers is filled with two immiscible types of liquid of which one is colored. When compressing one of the two chambers, the interface between the two fluids shows the time.

Half way between Oppenheimer and professor Tournesol, Lucien Vuillamoz impresses everybody with his freethinking, as if it were floating above the Quantum Vacuum. One could summarize his approach as the motto that illustrates Socrates' analytic thinking: "All I know is that I know nothing"

Vuillamoz specialized in thermodynamics at the renowned nuclear and corpuscular physics department at the University of Geneva. As a compulsive inventor, his academic background told him he had an extraordinary concept at hand but he knew that mastering the physical constraints for its development required great skill.




HYT H2

From concept to the first prototype

When one has a revolutionary idea, the first thing to do is to protect it. Since he lacked the necessary knowledge in this field, Vuillamoz turned to his friend, Patrick Berdoz, who has vast experience in the field of intellectual property. After the usual preliminary study, it seemed that the technologies could in fact be protected. With the logistical and financial help of Patrick Berdoz who believed that this daring project had a future, novelty searches were carried out and advanced deposits were made. "There are currently eight patent families", explained Vuillamoz. "Protecting intellectual property is at the heart of HYT's strategy and its sister company Preciflex. The latter is the technological platform in the fields of indication and its aim is to control the movement of very small amounts of fluid for diverse applications".

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HYT Fluid module

Once the first vital step was taken, the HYT company was established and a fund raising campaign was launched in order to start the production of a first functional prototype. The second part of this article will reveal the amount of constraints that had to be dealt with in order to make this unique project a success.

The challenges in the creation of a reliable, feasible and marketable product are numerous and indubitably require setting up a team that possess both the necessary skills and enough audacity to prepare to explore what has never been explored before. In 2010, Vuillamoz met the providential man who would manage the HYT company and pass his communication skills on to the construction and promotion of the brand's image. That man is Vincent Perrirad. His talent and sincere taste for innovation were hailed during his previous watchmaking works. This fine team was soon completed with the arrival of Bruno Moutartier, former industrial director of Audemars Piguet, who hired Jean François Mojon and his team - Chronode - to produce the movement of the HYT H1.



HYT H1 and the fluid module

Multiple perspectives

Everyone knows the rest of the story: Firstly, HYT had all attendees focusing on their stand that presented, with the H1, a new dimension in time display at BaselWorld 2012. Then, most watchmaking commentators started hailing the achievement of inserting liquid inside a mechanical watch. Finally, the challenges for the production of the H1 were particularly complex and alien to the watchmaking culture. Thus, only a handful of watch experts instantly understood the exact functioning of the fluid module. With the cooperation of the actors of this development, the second part of this article will shed light on the functioning and developments required to put the HYT H1 on the market. To be continued...

[HYT Technologies Part 2: Functioning and constraints](#)

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