

Named after an eminent eighteenth-century watchmaker, Louis Moinet finally reaches the United States

The Tempograph ranges in price from \$28,000 to \$59,000, depending on the materials used.



Haute Tech



The early-nineteenth-century Louis Moinet clock at left depicts a semi-recumbant Minerva. It was purchased by President Monroe to grace the White House, where it remains today.

Every spring, the proliferation of new watch brands we see in Switzerland has us wondering if the market for fine timepieces will ever be saturated. We should know better. Even as economic indicators point toward recession and global belt-tightening, we hear from watch brand managers that supply cannot possibly keep up with demand—especially at the top end of horology.

This past spring at BaselWorld, Louis Moinet, a young *haute horlogerie* house founded seven years ago by Jean-Marie Schaller and Micaela Bartolucci, exhibited a range of timepieces whose variety and pedigree belied the firm's young existence—young, at any

rate, for an industry whose average marque seems to hover somewhere over the century line.

Since the firm's founding, Schaller has steered Louis Moinet in a decidedly retrograde direction, using finely sourced materials and movements, as well as the name and philosophy of a contemporary of (and advisor to) A.-L. Breguet to foster an image of classical watchmaking and genuine exclusivity. Louis Moinet the man was a celebrated horologist—a supplier to kings, presidents and other heads of state. Visitors to Monticello and the White House can see vintage Louis Moinet clocks gracing areas used to receive guests.

Even now, Louis Moinet pro-

duces only about 1,000 timepieces annually—this in an era when many of the most august watch brands produce around ten times that. Moinet's modest production is a result of necessity; this is manifest when one considers that the firm uses only movements that are exclusive to the brand itself, whether vintage calibers that cannot be found in other watches being made today or new movements developed by the firm in cooperation with some of Switzerland's most talented complications specialists.

Given all of these qualities, whose sum would seem to place Louis Moinet securely in the category of true luxury, it's rather astonishing that only this year the brand is making inroads in the still-booming U.S. luxury watch market, whose potential for growth is a cause for optimism in many a luxury brand's boardroom.

Louis Moinet's presence in the U.S. owes as much to Schaller's desire to tap America's consumer potential as it does to serendipity, according to Michael Brader Araje, the president of the newly formed Louis Moinet North America. Araje and Schaller got together at the behest of a mutual



The movement created for use in the Magistralis, which is yet to be completed, alongside the lunar meteorite used to make its moon-phase indicator.

friend who saw in each a simpatico businessman, with compatible views on fine watches and entrepreneurship. A meeting in New York led to the partnership, formed in February of 2008 and announced to the industry two short months later at BaselWorld.

The watches

Two highlights of the new releases announced at BaselWorld are the Tempograph and the Magistralis. The Tempograph's signature feature, its retrograde seconds display, is a unique version of the technology pioneered by Jean Marc Weidrecht and watchmaker Roger Dubuis. The Tempograph marks off the time in ten-second increments, a shorter-than-normal amount of time for this complication, whose proliferation this year

at BaselWorld was noted by several industry experts.

With its ten-second dance, the Tempograph ensures that the exciting moment when the seconds hand "snaps back" and resumes its journey is never far away. Louis Moinet has also made the cam mechanism devised to power the retrograde function visible to the wearer, providing yet another measure of satisfaction—satisfaction for just sixty lucky owners who will have a chance to buy this limited edition. The Tempograph is available in five executions, in combinations incorporating rose gold, titanium, steel and PVD.

The Magistralis, though not completed in time for BaselWorld, nonetheless drew considerable attention at the annual watch fair for its concept and use of a most

unusual watchmaking material—real lunar rock. The Magistralis is a repeating watch that ships with a wooden box that has been engineered for acoustical performance. When the timepiece is placed atop the box, the same principle at work in violins causes its sound to reverberate and amplify considerably.

Svend Andersen, Martin Braun and Perrelet have created extremely realistic moonphase displays in the last few years, a creative and photogenic flourish that many appreciate a good deal more than the yellow moons found so commonly throughout the watch industry today. Louis Moinet's answer to the challenge of making a realistic moonphase was not to try to mimic the moon as it appears from earth, but to use real lunar rock. Schaller purchased the rock

The Vertalis Tourbillon (\$215,000)



(actually called lunar meteorite, because it landed on the earth's surface) from an undisclosed seller.

The stone was discovered in Dhofar, a desert in the Sultanate of Oman. Schaller has not divulged what he paid for the stone or exactly who the seller was, but the 31.45 gram piece of lunar meteorite was not cheap. The going rate for lunar meteorite is more than silver, gold, platinum and rhodium combined. Schaller sent a small piece of the meteorite to UCLA's Institute of Geophysics and Planetary Physics for authentication, whose vetting process included a full chemical analysis of the rock compared to data collected on rocks brought back from NASA's Apollo missions.

The third of the all-new watches debuted this year at BaselWorld is the Vertalis, a tourbillon made in a limited edition of twelve pieces. As the name implies, verticality is at the core of this watch's design. There is a single, hand-drawn and beveled vertical bar that connects the tourbillon carriage to the barrel.

Also adding to the visual appeal of this timepiece is the fact that the barrel has been left open so that its mainspring is visible through a cutout in the dial. Because of this, a power-reserve in-

The Twintech (\$17,900)



indicator is not necessary for the hand-wound caliber. Examining the barrel and seeing the relative tautness of the mainspring should be enough to let you know if the watch needs a few turns of the crown.

The Vertalis's hand-wound movement beats at 21,600 bph, with a power reserve of 80 hours. Its 47 mm case, made of 5N rose gold and white gold, is constructed of fifty parts. Its see-through back and dial-side crystal are both made of antireflective sapphire glass. The Vertalis ships on a hand-stitched Louisiana alligator strap.

The TwinTech is the timepiece most watch enthusiasts think of when the Louis Moinet brand comes to mind. Its

movement is based on a sketch produced by Louis Moinet himself in 1848, in his celebrated treatise on watchmaking, *Traite d'Horlogerie*.

The Twintech movement draws from Moinet's published views regarding double-barrel movements and optimizing power reserve, and results in a timepiece that bridges the past and present of *haute horlogerie*. Moinet brought an academic, even intellectual rigor to his study of watchmaking; and his treatise, on which he spent over twenty years writing, is considered the definitive work on watchmaking of the era.

The rectangular Twintech case became an instant classic for Louis

Moinet, which has rolled out a number of different versions of the piece, using different colors and materials to appeal to a wide range of tastes, while also guaranteeing a limited production of 60 pieces for each version.

All of the Twintechs, like nearly all Louis Moinet watches,



Left: The Chronovintage (\$9,900)

Right: The Variograph (\$13,100)

feature the prominent use of côtes du Jura, a decoration developed exclusively for use in Louis Moinet watches. Côtes du Jura cover all parts of the Twintech's dial, and can also be seen on its base plate when viewing the back of the watch through its caseback. The Twintech's functions include standard displays of the hours, minutes and seconds, as well as a retrograde date, a power-reserve indicator, and a visible balance.

If understated elegance is a main theme the brand has sought for the aforementioned watches, Louis Moinet has continued on

that track with the Chronovintage. Limited to 120 pieces, divided into two versions, one with a charcoal dial and the other with a silver dial, the Chronovintage uses a chronograph movement produced in the 1970s that is virtually impossible to find these days, according to the firm. Perhaps someday Louis Moinet will develop a proprietary chronograph movement, a monumental task for any watch firm. But for now, it has settled on a rare vintage movement to meet its demands for rarity and exclusivity.

The Variograph is Louis Moinet's chronograph with complete calendar. Limited to 240 pieces,

sixty each in four executions, the Variograph incorporates two innovations exclusive to Louis Moinet. Its full-moon indicator, found at 6 o'clock, is distinguished from standard moonphases because it offers a precise indication of the day of the full moon. Its other exclusive function is a 24-hour world map which rotates once every 24 hours. The ring surrounding the world map is used to tell the time around the world. This indication is synchronized with the local time in the place to which each watch is delivered. The Variograph comes exclusively in stainless steel. Each ships with a strap made of genuine alligator leather. ©