

Christophe Claret

Once upon a time...

There was a young watchmaker with a passion for the complex mechanics of time, who was born in Lyon, France in 1962. Graduating from the Geneva School of Watchmaking, he learnt his craft alongside Roger Dubuis, before opening his own vintage restoration workshop in the family home. Although Christophe Claret's destiny appeared to have been ordained, he had to wait until 1987 to achieve the recognition of his peers: Rolf Schnyder, the owner of the brand Ulysse Nardin, was sufficiently impressed by a quarter repeater movement with an automaton designed by Christophe Claret that he ordered twenty minute repeater calibers with San Marco jacquemarts at the Baselworld international watch fair. Capitalizing on this momentum, in 1989 Mr Claret founded the Claret Manufacture in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, the cradle of the world's watchmaking industry. The manufacture soon established itself in the big league, thanks to its expertise in creating complicated movements.

Working behind the scenes for the most prestigious brands, Mr Claret also created special models commissioned by collectors and bearing his own name. But it wasn't until 2009, and the launch of the DualTow, that the public at large finally discovered the talent of this exceptional watchmaker, already acclaimed by his peers. The Christophe Claret brand now belongs to the exclusive circle of independent watch manufacturers capable of mastering the entire production process of Haute Horlogerie watches – from the original idea through to final regulation.

Christophe Claret boasts a unique, comprehensive expertise and an exclusive collection that pushes back the boundaries of possibility and offers brand new ways to display time. This expertise, which is nourished by a respect for tradition and the freedom to create, is crystallized into four lines of timepieces: The Traditional Complications collection features unique pieces and exceptional models that reinvent time measurement; the Extreme Complications collection is dedicated to creations as audacious as they are unconventional; while the Interactive Gaming Complications collection serves to remind us that time can also be recreational; the Ladies' Complications collection where Haute Horlogerie comes in a feminine form.

"In watchmaking, everything has already been done, and everything has yet to be invented": whether a creed or a ritual, the Christophe Claret formula is evident at every stage of the design process within the manufacture's atelier. The watchmaker takes his inspiration from tradition and heritage to create exceptional and surprising creations. His watches are at the cutting edge of technology and innovation, offering new forms of expression for the most classic of grand complications. Sometimes playful, often spectacular, the timepieces are infused with the emotion of discovery, discipline and intuition that turn a watchmaker into an artist.

The master watchmaker

There was nothing to suggest that the young Christophe Claret would eventually make the cycle of time his own. It was only after a chance visit to a watchmaker-restorer at the age of 14 that the possibility presented itself. From that point on, the mechanics of time would grow to become his passion. At just 19 years of age, he graduated from the Geneva Watchmaking School, continuing his education with the master-watchmaker Roger Dubuis who, in taking him under his wing, passed on the secrets of restoration and the mysteries of complex horological mechanisms.

Upon returning to his native city of Lyon, Christophe Claret set up his first horological workshop in the family home. He decided to specialize in restoring antique timepieces, perfecting his finishing techniques and crafting open-work or "skeletonized" watches.

1987 was a year of revelation: during his first visit to the Baselworld international watch fair, Christophe Claret met a man who would alter the course of his life. Rolf Schnyder, a Swiss industrialist who had just acquired the Ulysse Nardin brand, placed an order with Mr Claret for twenty minute repeater movements with San Marco jacquemarts. It provided the impetus he needed and two years later Mr Claret founded his first company, which was soon followed by another, 'Manufacture Claret'.

Within a decade, the name Christophe Claret became a benchmark in the field of complicated movements. Following on from Ulysse Nardin, seventeen other prestigious customers, including Franck Muller, deGrisogono, Girard-Perregaux, Jean Dunand and Harry Winston, turned to him to develop their most complex calibers. Christophe Claret therefore decided to establish his company within a setting worthy of his reputation and his ambitions. In 1999, Christophe Claret acquired the Manoir du Soleil d'Or, a venerable mansion on the hills overlooking the nearby town of Le Locle, a stone's throw from the Musée d'Horlogerie des Monts. There he set up his workshops, breathing new life into the residence formerly owned by the watchmaker Urban Jürgensen.

From 2002 to 2008, Manufacture Claret expanded its workshops by a further 2000 m². Today, operating at the cutting edge of technology and expertise, it employs almost a hundred highly-qualified experts in over thirty separate disciplines.

While continuing to design exceptional movements for the most prestigious brands, Christophe Claret also produces watches bearing his own name, often one-of-a-kind creations commissioned by collectors won over by Mr Claret's superlative horological mastery. Initially a low-key activity, his Christophe Claret branded pieces gained a higher profile in 2009 when he created the DualTow to celebrate the Manufacture's 20th anniversary. This mechanical distillation of all of the watchmaker's talent unlocked a freedom to create which resulted in highly complex, exclusive pieces.

The Christophe Claret brand now belongs to the extremely exclusive circle of independent Haute Horlogerie brands that design, develop and produce their watches entirely in-house. An exceptional location at the heart Swiss watchmaking, placing it firmly at the forefront of horological innovation.

The manufacture

To gain recognition in the world of Haute Horlogerie is something that very few watchmakers can now expect to accomplish. In order to succeed, Christophe Claret constantly reviews the manufacture's quality criteria. Respect for watchmaking traditions and time-honoured savoir-faire go hand in hand with a quest for innovation and excellence.

Because he understands that environment influences creativity and quality, Christophe Claret has always made sure that his staff enjoy superior working conditions. The offices and workshops are regularly refurbished, and the organization of work is fine-tuned to encourage communication and cooperation. Staff benefit from ultra-modern equipment in a beautifully tranquil setting.

Every year, Christophe Claret invests in new machines and tools, often designing his own machines under the name of Christophe Claret Engineering. The Flashcut Laser cutting machine designed by the company offers as yet unrivaled cutting accuracy and speed. The simultaneous 16-axis CNC, which took three years to design and develop, is used to produce the manufacture's most complex mainplates and cases.

New models start their life in the design department. Movement design engineers, watch exterior design engineers, designers and computer graphics specialists all give shape and color to the exceptional complications conceived by Christophe Claret. Then it's over to the watchmaking ateliers. The hundreds of components that make up the movements are painstakingly produced by the very finest craftsmen, assisted

by state-of-the-art technology. CNC operators, bar turners, electroplaters, case finishers and heat treatment specialists perform the ultra-precise movements that characterize this extremely demanding discipline.

Alongside the machines, the nimble fingers of the craftsmen and watchmakers practice their discipline like an art belonging to a bygone era, yet paradoxically more alive today than ever. Haute Horlogerie is one of the few sectors that could not have survived without these extremely specialized skills, finely honed and often drawing on traditional craftsmanship. A large part of the work is carried out exclusively by hand. And therein lies the magic of Haute Horlogerie. Specialists in anglage, trimming, drawing-out and decoration draw on years of experience often handed down from generation to generation. The guilloché, engraving and enameling work is entrusted to only the very finest craftsmen in Switzerland. Finally, the master watchmakers of the manufacture assemble each and every part of the movement, from A to Z.

All of the components then undergo stringent testing in the "TCR" Testing, Certification and Reliability) atelier, where they receive their certificate of production. Chiming watches are subject to particular scrutiny: to guarantee a perfect melody, the quality of the gongs, the frequency and the duration of the notes and their intervals are all computer-tested. Each piece then undergoes a final validation by Christophe Claret himself.

The collections

Traditional Complication Watches

Maestro

At the crossroads between aesthetics and technicality, the new Maestro showcases an original take on the horological creativity of Christophe Claret. Its glass dome provides a striking, almost dizzying view of the movement architecture and the famous Charles X bridges. Endowed with a seven-day power reserve, a cone-shaped large date display and a 3D MEMO function, Maestro asserts itself as the first Haute Complication watch by Christophe Claret with a CHF 68,000 price tag.

Allegro

Allegro is the latest musical watch from Christophe Claret. A master watchmaker with more than 30 years of experience, Christophe Claret has combined the finest horological complications in Allegro: minute repeater with cathedral gongs, GMT with day/night indicator, big date and small seconds. These features are all found in a completely redesigned movement featuring a unique regulator that was designed and manufactured in-house. The round case harmoniously blends either 5N red gold or white gold with titanium. An opening in the sapphire dial reveals the striking mechanism. The transparent dial allows the wearer to marvel at the movement's architecture, featuring Charles X style skeletonized, stepped bridges. With this new timepiece, the conductor of this musical horological orchestra from Le Locle proves he is at the zenith of his art.

Aventicum

Christophe Claret has always been intrigued by the history of Aventicum, which was the capital of Roman Helvetia for more than 300 years and the ruins of which now lie near the Swiss town of Avenches. Even today at the Aventicum excavation sites, archaeologists continue to unearth precious artefacts dating from this rich era of antiquity. Among the excavated objects was a priceless finding: a solid gold bust of Emperor Marcus Aurelius, which was found in 1939 when an old pipe was being cleaned.

A micro-engraved gold replica of the Marcus Aurelius bust can be found in the centre of the dial. The faithful, small-scale representation of the Emperor – measuring less than three millimetres – is displayed in magnified form thanks to a clever invention called the mirascope. In implementing this optical effect in Aventicum, the bust of Marcus Aurelius looks as if it is thrusting out of the middle of the watch.

Turning over Aventicum, the transparent sapphire-winding rotor of the automatic movement can be admired through the display back. The rotor is embellished with five chariots in full swing of a thrilling competition.

Aventicum is available in two limited editions: 68 pieces in 5N red gold and anthracite PVD-treated grade 5 titanium; and 38 pieces in white gold and anthracite PVD-treated grade 5 titanium.

Mecca

Exactly like the effigy of Emperor Marcus Aurelius enthroned at the heart of the Aventicum model, it is the micro-engraving of the Kaaba which is highlighted by the mirascope in the center of the dial of Mecca.

The Mecca timepiece features a wealth of emblematic elements and references to the Muslim faith. The Arabic hour numerals were then replaced at 5 o'clock by a white ceramic stone and at 7 o'clock by a black spinel. The latter symbolizes the black stone located at the South-East angle of the Kaaba through which Muslims start the seven rounds of the Tawaf in a counterclockwise direction. The white ceramic represents this same stone, as described in the Koran before it became black due to repeated touching by pilgrims.

The aesthetic and symbolic spectacle is continued on to the back of the Mecca timepiece. The ball-bearing cover is adorned with a transfer depicting the Kaaba, with the movement's self-winding oscillating weight rotating around it. Crafted in sapphire so as to reveal the meticulous movement finishing, the oscillating weight bears a transferred world map featuring white dots symbolizing Muslims turning around the Kaaba.

Maestoso

Equipped with a traditional pivoted detent escapement with a constant-force device, this timepiece is a vibrant tribute to watchmaking heritage and innovation.

Developed in the 18th century, this type of detent escapement is regarded as the quintessence of chronometric precision, even ahead of the tourbillon. At the time, it was used primarily in marine chronometers, mounted on a gimbal suspension to ensure an invariable position. Though it demonstrated exemplary reliability, it actually had the weakness of being particularly sensitive to lateral shocks, which could upset the detent, make the balance wheel over-bank and upset timing.

To overcome these constraints, a series of complex technical solutions, three of which have been awarded patents, were developed by Christophe Claret. An anti-pivot cam and an articulated bridge prevent the detent turning over, while a safety thrust bearing, constant force mechanism and stop seconds minimise the risk of over-banking. As well as these ingenious solutions, a micrometric worm screw on the regulator, also patented, is used to regulate the timing rate. And last, but certainly not least, Maestoso is equipped with two mainspring barrels, each with two concentric springs, which transmit optimal force to the escapement and provide more than 80 hours of power reserve. Their configuration makes full use of the case height and illustrates the constant dialogue between the aesthetic and the technical, an approach very dear to Christophe Claret.

Kantharos

This monopusher chronograph striking on a cathedral gong also features a constant-force escapement guaranteeing extreme time-keeping accuracy by substantially reducing rate variations. The mechanism may be admired beneath a meticulously beveled sapphire bridge, revealing the full extent of the master watchmaker's expertise.

Kantharos enriches the world of short-time measurements with an ingenious chiming system triggered by each change of mode (start, stop, reset). The chronograph delivers peerless and reliable performance. In order to increase accuracy, the clutch disk system, which was inspired by car transmissions, prevents the second hand

from jumping when the chronograph starts. This useful, functional and entertaining chronograph plays on the sensory – acoustic and tactile – interaction between the instrument and its owner.

The Kantharos caliber, a self-winding mechanical movement, contains the first components to be made from M-15X. This material, never before used in the watch industry, has been developed in cooperation with L. Klein SA. It epitomizes the particular attention Christophe Claret devotes to R&D, whether in terms of horological complications, machinery or materials. M-15X is a type of steel made using powder metallurgy-based production technology that provides a homogeneous microstructure and a very fine grain. This material helps to achieve remarkably high-quality mirror-polished finishes.

Soprano

The Soprano combines two of the most exquisite horological complications: the tourbillon and the minute repeater with Westminster chimes, which are enhanced by open-worked bridges reminiscent of the Charles X style. The round case subtly marries two contrasting metals, gold and titanium, in a spirit of combined tradition and modernity – two of the manufacture's core values.

The 4-note minute repeater strikes Westminster Quarters on four patented cathedral gongs with four hammers, visible by the absence of a dial. Special attention has been paid to the musical accuracy. For this creation, as for previous minute repeaters, Christophe Claret has placed the emphasis on the production of the gong in drawn steel, the quality of its tuning, the design of the case and the interconnection of movement and case. Soprano also benefits from a Christophe Claret patented invention that prevents vibrations and shocks from interfering with the gongs.

Extreme Complication Watches

The X-TREM-1

X for eXperimental, T for Time, R for Research, E for Engineering, M for Mechanism. A tourbillon equipped timepiece that uses a magnetic system to display hours and minutes, the X-TREM-1 embodies Christophe Claret's desire to transcend the limits of watch mechanics by incorporating brand new fields of research.

The X-TREM-1 represents the boldest of challenges: the introduction of a magnetic field – normally the archenemy of horological mechanisms – into the heart of a watch. Christophe Claret has designed a system comprising two tiny hollowed steel spheres, which indicate the hours and minutes and are housed inside sapphire tubes either side of the caseband. The steel balls appear to move magically with no mechanical connection thanks to precision magnetic fields generated by two miniature magnets moved by tiny cables. With no mechanical connection with the movement, the balls appear to float inside the tubes.

All of the construction and finishes of this timepiece meet the manufacture's extremely stringent requirements. The three-dimensional curvex main plate and bridges are made from ultra-light titanium - a first for such a complex caliber. The flying tourbillon is equipped with double ceramic ball bearings that improve shock resistance.

Gaming Complication Watches

Poker

Poker is an exceptional automaton watch. Its development required two watchmaker-constructors working full time for over two years. Users can immerse themselves in real three-player games of the most popular variant of poker: Texas Hold'em. The challenge was incorporating a complete 52-card game following the

rules of poker, with a large number of gameplay possibilities, all together in a mechanical movement. In total, Poker packs in 32,768 different combinations, i.e. 98,304 combinations for three players. The probabilities were calculated so that each player has approximately the same chances of winning.

Two pushers activate the deals at each round of betting, including the flop, the turn and the river. On the dial, three windows present each player's cards, invisible to the other players thanks to a special blinds system that conceal each hand from other players. True to his mastery of chiming watches, Christophe Claret has equipped Poker with a cathedral gong, which sounds each time a pusher is activated.

Baccara

Creative, playful and unconventional, Baccara takes much of its inspiration from the world of gaming. It houses a miniature casino which, in addition to traditional timepiece functions, features completely original complications such as baccarat, roulette and dice, each one of them appealing to our audio, visual, and tactile senses. Baccarat cards are distributed by pressing the push-buttons corresponding to the player or the bank. A chime sounds when a card is revealed. The dice are housed in a cage positioned at 4 o'clock; the roulette wheel appears on the case back, where the oscillating weight of the automatic winding rotor acts as the turntable.

Depending on the model, a dragon or tiger, is emblazoned on the dial to symbolize good luck. Symbolism is also expressed in the Chinese ideogram for luck which materializes on the sapphire crystal when the watch is breathed on: the heat of the exhaled air reveals it for a few seconds, thanks to a process specially developed for Christophe Claret in which the sapphire crystal is metalized.

Blackjack

A miniature casino combining precision mechanics with the world of games, Blackjack introduced the concept of the playful, interactive watch. The dice, which are housed in a cage, are visible through a side window in the watch band. The roulette game is positioned on the back of the watch, with the oscillating weight representing the turntable. Finally, the dial features a blackjack game.

The player's four cards appear in windows in the lower section of the dial. The upper section includes three more windows which display the bank cards. A push-button tensions a spring that simultaneously projects seven gold disks on which the cards are printed. After a few seconds, they are stopped randomly by damper-springs. A chime sounds each time a flap opens for the player or the bank.

Ladies' Complications Watches

Marguerite

At the heart of this new watchmaking fable, two graceful butterflies flit around a daisy to give the time. The darker one, symbolizing the female, is perched on a daisy petal that rotates every hour. The lighter one, embodying the male, sits lightly atop a stem attached to the pistil, indicates the minutes.

In addition to the time indication, the dial presents a second display. One press on the pusher at 2 o'clock makes the numbers disappear to reveal the phrase: "Il m'aime passionnément" (He loves me passionately). Releasing the pusher makes the hour display reappear instantly.

On the back, the owner can indulge in the "He loves me, he loves me not" game, the simplified English version of daisy petals, invented in the 18th century. In order to play, the watch must be placed in a horizontal position and accompanied by one or two undulating movements. The oscillating weight then turns for a few seconds prior to standing still. The ruby closest to the red-lacquered heart provides the response – "yes" or "no" in the center.

More than ever, the Marguerite establishes itself as a vivid symbol of the romantic game of love and chance. A watch to be loved passionately in all five versions – white or 5N red gold, “flake” or “champagne” set.

Margot

“He loves me... He loves me not.” A game of luck or a game of love? What hopeless romantic hasn’t ever picked the petals off a daisy to discover how their sweetheart feels about them? On the dial of Margot – the first Christophe Claret timepiece specifically developed for women – this classic conundrum comes to life thanks to a totally original display and patented complication.

With each press of the pusher at 2 o’clock, a petal – sometimes a pair of petals – subtly disappears under the dial, perfectly depicting the delicate undressing of the daisy. The eagerly-awaited answer appears at random in calligraphic letters (in French): Un peu (a little) – beaucoup (a lot) – passionnément (passionately) – à la folie (madly) – pas du tout (not at all)? At each press of the pusher, a striking mechanism creates a crystalline chime, aurallysignaling the pace of the game.

The natural mother of pearl dial also reveals, at the whim of its iridescent reflections, delicately engraved verses from a poem penned by Victor Hugo, one of the standard-bearers of the 19th century French Romantic movement.

Layla

Layla is a variation of Margot, the first Christophe Claret complication specifically developed for women, suffused with oriental colors in a 20-piece limited series.

The eagerly-awaited answer of the “He loves me... he loves me not” game appears at random in calligraphic letters (in Arabic) on the dial at 8 o’clock: Un peu (a little) – beaucoup (a lot) – passionnément (passionately) – à la folie (madly) – pas du tout (not at all)? The difficulty for the Christophe Claret team lay in adapting the movement of the Margot for this interpretation so as to match the right-to-left direction of Arabic script.

The natural pink mother-of-pearl dial reveals delicately engraved verses penned by the Arab poet, Qays Al Mulawwah.

The display back reveals the self-winding rotor, a delicately carved, flower-shaped carousel of colors symbolizing sentiments of love, with a central cabochon concealing the rotor’s ball bearings. Each one of the eight resplendent triangular precious stones denote a feeling – hope, passion, tenderness – also translated into Arabic.