

Philippe Dufour

Philippe Dufour biography

Philippe Dufour is both one of the world's finest watchmakers and a passionate ambassador for preserving and promoting the arts and craft of haute horlogerie for the next generation of master watchmakers.

Dufour grew up and lives in the small rural village of Le Sentier in the Vallée de Joux, Switzerland. And although the picturesque region is a hub of fine watchmaking, that wasn't a career he ever contemplated at school. When he was 15 years old, his parents told him that they could not afford to support him furthering his studies away from home, so he would have to find something local. Dufour liked working with his hands and wanted to be a mechanic; however, he was told that his grades weren't good enough to be a mechanic, but probably acceptable for a watchmaker. So watchmaking it was.

He graduated from the Le Sentier Watchmaking School in 1967 and accepted an offer from Jaeger-LeCoultre, which is also based in Le Sentier, but sent him to Germany. Having spent his life until then in a remote rural area had instilled in Dufour a desire to see more of the world: after Germany, he worked in England and then in the Caribbean before returning to Switzerland in 1974.

Back in Switzerland, Dufour first worked as a watchmaker for Gerald Genta and Audemars Piguet, and then in 1978 set up his own restoration atelier 1978 in which he did a lot of work for Osvaldo Patrizzi (founder of Antiquorum watch auctions).

As Dufour restored more and more beautiful pocket watches, he noticed that whatever big brand name on the dial, many of the movements were made in the Vallée de Joux, which set him thinking: "If they were able to make complicated movements in the past, I should be able to make them now."

And make one he did: for his very first watch Dufour designed and made the most demanding complication of them all, a grande et petite sonnerie with minute repeater pocket watch. It took him three long years, and when it was finished he could not afford the gold or platinum case it deserved, so he offered the movement to Audemars Piguet, who accepted on the condition he make five more. While that did mean five years of guaranteed work, it also meant at least a five-year delay to his ultimate goal: a watch with his own name on the dial.

To that end, in 1989 Dufour bought himself a computer, taught himself how to use a CAD program and set to work. And three years later at Baselworld 1992, he astounded the watch world by presenting the world's first grande et petite sonnerie with minute repeater wristwatch that was simultaneously the world's first watch with "Philippe Dufour" on the dial. It wouldn't be the last.

In 1996 Dufour presented his second watch, the Duality: the world's first wristwatch regulated by the average rate of not one but two escapements.

Then in 2000 Dufour surprised yet again: after creating two very complicated timepieces, he went in the other direction with a three-handed time-only watch he called the Simplicity. Like all of his previous timepieces, the Simplicity was distinguished by absolutely superlative hand-finishing. But without the distraction of complex engineering the ethereal beauty of hand-finishing took on new prominence. Fortuitously, the launch of the Simplicity coincided with the rise of internet watch discussions forums (early social media), and this enabled a lone watchmaker in the Swiss mountains to develop global appreciation and clientele.



As well as making his timepieces, Dufour is a member of the Time Aeon Foundation, a non-profit organization with the goal of preserving the crafts associated with watchmaking excellence and passing them on to new generations.

“The value of my timepieces is in the handwork and the craftsmanship. I put a part of myself in my watches, and the owner can feel that.”