

ENGRAVED invitations

Kees Engelbarts, an exceptional Dutch engraver, is the driving force behind Cornelius & Cie, his new company that concentrates on using rare movements and handcrafted designs

BY ELIZABETH DOERR

Kees Engelbarts is not of the opinion that a watch needs to be masterminded by a watchmaker for it to be unique, special, and sought-after by collectors. It was exactly this type of outside-the-box thinking that has been such a special gift to the world of watches.

A young Dutch engraver of exceptional talent living in Geneva, Engelbarts embarked upon an adventure that few engravers ensconced in the watch industry have ever attempted: making and selling wristwatches under his own name.

With years of education in engraving at Holland's Gold and Silversmith Academy in Schoonhoven and Idar-Oberstein, Germany's professional school for jewelry design, under his belt, Engelbarts went to Geneva for practical experience. Soon certain that watches were his medium, he worked with Franck Muller at Watchland for a year and a half



Kees Engelbarts



The full skeleton version of the platinum Chronosome 46XY model.



Kees Engelbarts engraves using a microscope.

starting in 1994 before going independent. He took on work from some of the industry's greatest names in watchmaking as well as some well-known independent watchmakers such as Svend Andersen, Peter Speake-Marin, Philippe Dufour and Antoine Prezioso.

As beautiful as these watches were, it was the timepieces that he created from about 1997 for his own pleasure that were the standout specialties. These delicacies more often than not included some form of engraved mokumé gané on them, a laminate that Engelbarts produced himself.

Independents

The current watchmaking era seems to be a time of massive consolidation and conglomeration, with the result that independents

and smaller, privately owned companies are now stepping forward with small series of watches.

"I think it's a reaction to what's happening in the watch business right now. Big companies, even if they don't call it a fusion, are fusing, and they try to tell the public that every watch brand will keep its own identity and image. But in the end it's like selling VW engines in both Rolls Royce and Ferrari chassis. It's still a VW," says Engelbarts.

"They (the large companies) are leaving an empty space where we, the independents, can make things for people who want something else."

Taking both the fact that Engelbarts has been steadily gaining recognition within the watch industry over the last decade and his

attitude toward entrepreneurship into account, it should come as no surprise that he would finally found a small company.

Partnership

Joining forces with Dutch jeweler Paul Pertijs, Engelbarts has now given his particular brand of craftsmanship a permanent home. Pertijs, an old friend Engelbarts first met when both were studying at the Dutch Gold and Silversmith Academy, heads up the Pertijs Jewellers Group, which he expanded into a four-boutique enterprise from one high-end retail shop. Engelbarts is Cornelius & Cie.'s creative director, while Pertijs functions as the company's commercial director. The company is named for Engelbarts's real first name, Cornelius. →



The back of the gold Chronosome 46XY.

Products

This company's watches are in a way a conceptual continuation of Engelbarts's solo timepieces. While he previously preferred to engrave Frédéric Piguet movements, Cornelius & Cie. has chosen to use A. Schild Caliber 690 from 1935 for the company's first series of timepieces.

It goes without saying that these rare movements will be decorated, skeletonized, and engraved entirely by Engelbarts. AS Caliber 690 is a large, robust movement that beats at the vintage frequency of 18,000 bph. When the manually wound mainspring is fully tensioned, it possesses a power reserve of eight days.

The first collection to emerge is called Chronosome 46XY, a limited-edition powered by the vintage movement with an off-center spring barrel. When Engelbarts first saw AS Caliber 690, he was impressed by the quality that was immediately apparent, as well as its accuracy and unique design, which includes a leaf spring shock absorber that is not unlike Abraham-Louis Breguet's parachute system.

Every component of each movement is meticulously decorated by hand and rhodium-plated, with Engelbarts engraving and finishing the skeletonized components himself. The movement is then reassembled by a team of qualified watchmakers headed up by Jérôme Willert, formerly of Breguet.



The half-skeleton version of the gold Chronosome 46XY.



A. Schild Caliber 690 from 1935 looks nothing like it did before Kees Engelbarts got his hands on it.

The unique positioning of the movement's spring barrel is mirrored in the signature shape of the Chronosome 46XY's case, which is manufactured by Michel Jossierand of Besançon, France, and is available in platinum or red gold. The cases are outfitted with sapphire crystals on both the front and the back. A button located at 2 o'clock on the case separates the crown from the winding mechanism so that it can also be used to set the hands (instead of pulling out the crown, as would be the case with a modern movement).

Due to the asymmetric quality of the case, Engelbarts has designed a unique strap attachment system that utilizes two small brass wedges to lock the alligator skin strap in place. The client can choose to have the movement and dial either partially or fully skeletonized. Diamond setting on the case, which is 49 mm in diameter and 16.3 mm in height, is also available upon request. The real kicker is that the nature of this type of work will allow each of the pieces to be customized as the client wishes.

Chronosome

The name of this first timepiece by Cornelius & Cie. is a combination of the words *chronos* and *some*. The word *chronos*, which should be well known to industry followers, means "time" in Greek, while *some*—derived from *soma*—means "body."

The obvious reference to the word "chromosome" is also not



unintentional. The number 46 refers to the number of chromosomes in a human cell.

Since Cornelius & Cie.'s first line was made with the male wrist in mind, Engelbarts and Pertijs added "XY" to it: the chromosome code indicating male. The planned ladies' edition will have "46XX" as its reference.

Pipeline

The year 2009 will see the advent of a sportier version of the Chro-

nosome 46XY that will be powered by automatic movements housed in steel cases, and plans for a ladies' version are also already underway. Cornelius & Cie. plans to introduce more complicated models the following year, with Engelbarts and Pertijs considering creating a proprietary movement. While production is currently limited to about sixty timepieces per year, the partners hope to achieve about 300 annually within the next two years. ©