



The Planetarium and the Clinique Horlogère.

July 2004, the manufacturers CompliTime, (Robert Greubel & Stephen Forsey), contact me and offer me an exceptional job.

A meeting is held at La Chaux-de-Fonds where I am shown a prototype of a planetarium, or orrory clock. If I accept the offer, my task will be to assemble a similar movement in which the original brass bridge will be replaced by one in titan.

Nothing has yet been decided regarding the casing for the Planetarium; the firm of Valgine & Richard Mille will be the one to design it.



As for me, to accept or not to accept is not a decision to be taken lightly. I ask permission to take the movement to Porrentruy in order to study it more closely:

The clock is 50cm long by 40cm large and roughly 30cm high, and is composed of onethousand fourhundred parts, of which 550 are screws.

No one could give me an estimate for the time required, but manufacturing and assembling the movement had taken ten years. Which makes it difficult to say precisely how long it would take me to do the job I was asked to do. . .

I think it over for several days and many telephone conversations with the designer Stephen Forsey later, a decision is reached, the adventure can begin.

Such a highly complex movement requires strict precision and a certain amount of organization. The number of parts is, after all, high : 1400 in all, of which 79 axes, 112 wheels and 550 screws. Furthermore, the size of the object itself calls for a suitable workspace.

For technical reasons, I divide the movement into 4 distinct parts corresponding to the chronological order in which they should be mounted:

- the basic movement along with its escapement-holder
- the central display, the seasons and the indicator for remaining rate
- the perpetual calendar and the equation
- the central frame which supports the planets

However, since not all the components have been manufactured yet, I begin by assembling the central frame. The prototype and three-dimensional views on the computer assist me in this task. Actually, every component part was supplied with its own plan.

Work can commence. I redo the length of practically all the screws and pins of the Planetarium ; I polish the pivots of the wheel axes, bore the bushes, countersink the wheels on their axes. Piece by piece, I treat each single component of the movement.

I also add some technical refinements and make a few suggestions with regard to esthetic aspects.

In september 2005, the movement is functional with its display and the central frame. Nevertheless, the perpetual calendar still has me very worried.

The engraver is still working on the season scroll since the design of the first version was at variance with the futuristic lines of the planetarium.

At about this time, Dominique Guenat, Director of Valgin, asks me if I would be willing to take over the assembly of the casing. Which is why, in 2006, on the final day of the SIHH Salon at Geneva, I meet Richard Mille at the Hotel des Bergues to discuss the matter. Until then I did not, in fact, have a precise idea about the design of the casing.

The months go by and the assembly reaches its end. I am satisfied since the clock functions very well and shows the time with great precision.

At the beginning of 2007, I receive a three-dimensional view which finally discloses the exterior of what is called the cage. Another meeting takes place. Philippe Schaefer, construction artist, is then designated to discuss with me any problems which could eventually arise during the assembly of the cage and the movement, to generally assist me and act as intermediary between all the craftsmen involved in preparing the casing : the engraver (for the planets), the glass manufacturer, the clock hands manufacturer, and so on.



To cite one example, the engraver, Olivier Vaucher does remarkable work. He makes our planet earth in solid silver. It weighs 91 grams and is covered with enamel in different colors with ornaments in relief. The moon is also in silver and shows all the craters. The sun is in yellow gold covered with enamel in tones going from red to through orange to yellow. Mercury is in pink gold and Venus is a natural stone.

In July 2007, I dedicate myself to assembling the cage and to the last finishing touches. Once the planetarium is fully mounted, it is weighed : 44 kilos with the cage and the glasses.

At the beginning of August, the journalist Théodore Diehl and the photographer photographe Guy de Peslouan, both sent by Richard Mille, show up in my workshop. For four days they work on preparing the promotional material for the planetarium, four days that were a very instructive experience for me.

As agree with Richard Mille, on August 29 I organize a cocktail party with the idea of bringing together all those who participated in the design and manufacture of this ambitious and demanding project.

I prove deep satisfaction at being able to share all these years of hard work, a satisfaction felt also by all those who contributed and can finally see the real thing, and not just pictures in magazines or in the web.

However, both Richard Mille and I are not totally satisfied with the front face of the clock. Each face of the planetarium is, in fact, faced in glass and allows one to admire its mechanical parts, all that is, except the front face. All this grey mass hides the inner beauty of the prestigious orrery.

But time is short since the planetarium will undertake a long voyage to Singapur where it will be on exhibit for the first time at the « The Hour Glass 'Tempus Event » , on September 4. The alterations to its design must therefore be postponed until after its return, which means that there will be a few more hours of work for me....

Today I am proud of myself for having assembled such an exceptional clockwork. It has been an extremely enriching experience, both from a technical and a human-relationship viewpoint. I want to thank all those with whom I have worked together, who had faith in me. I am particularly grateful to Richard Mille who allowed me to personally present the result of my craftsmanship. As for the photographs, they are, in part, by Guy de Peslouan and, in part, by myself.

