

## DENIS FLAGEOLLET INTERVIEW



## 2018 SELECTION



PHOTO: JAMES COLE

## PIERRE JACQUES' VISION



DE BETHUNE

X

## WATCH AROUND

100% IN-HOUSE

## TOTAL INDEPENDENCE

AUTONOMY. MANUFACTURE DE BETHUNE WAS DEVELOPED RIGHT FROM THE START THROUGH A PROCESS OF INTEGRATING THE ENTIRE RANGE OF WATCHMAKING SKILLS - THE ONLY MEANS OF GUARANTEEING UNHINDERED CREATIVITY. WITNESS THE 26 CALIBRES DEVELOPED IN 15 YEARS.

MANUFACTURE  
SPIRIT OF PLACE

Sainte-Croix, L'Auberson. At the heart of this border village located just a few metres from France lies a former music box factory. It is here that Denis Flageollet has set up a 100% integrated manufacturing facility. Everything is done in-house: from construction and machining to decoration, right the way down to the smallest screw.

IN THE STAR-STUDDED SKY  
AT THE HEART OF THE DE BETHUNE CONSTELLATION

"When finding one's bearings in space and time, the sky is the primary reference." De Bethune's master watchmaker and creative talent, Denis Flageollet, has adopted the sky as one of his recurrent themes, a role it has consistently played in watchmaking history. With the DB25 Tourbillon model (now joined by the "Milky Way" reference), the heavenly vault has become the central motif. All these one-of-a-kind models reproduce the night sky as viewed from a given place at a given time by the person commissioning the watch. The creation of this titanium dial, truly fascinating once complete, is a work of patience and precision. The stars are fitted one by one, before being riveted to the cosmos blue dial. The Milky Way (not visible on this picture) is delicately crafted from gold leaf. It all begins with the rough dial that must first be polished to a perfect mirror finish. Even the slightest imperfection at this stage would become a horrendous scar in the course of the process. The dial is given a protective lacquered coating and then sent back to the machine room to be cut out, cleaned and oven-blued. A magical moment entirely dependent on the artisan's expertise. A new inspection, a new layer of lacquer, and a new trip back to the machines - this time to pierce the sky. Around a hundred extremely precise holes are drilled to hold stars in the shape of tiny individually profile-turned gold spherical-head pins. An infinitely patient task. With each new drilling operation, the bit is trimmed, as any burrs could be fatal since a single scratch would mean starting all over again. One by one, the stars are then driven into their respective housings.

EXTERIOR  
COMPONENTS  
FLOATING LUGS

For De Bethune, a watch must be meaningful as well as comfortable to wear. On some models, the conventional watch lugs are replaced by patented floating lugs. These adapt to all movement types and any type of wrist. The one pictured here is a mirror-polished oven-blued titanium version.

BLUEING  
FLAMING MOON

The two-sided moon, the House emblem. A tiny yet extremely complex blue and mirror-polished sphere. Two half-moons are respectively carved out of steel and palladium. The two faces are then assembled and polished before being held over a flame that plunges the steel into its midnight blue hue, while sparing the mirror-finished palladium.

DECORATION  
CÔTES DE  
BETHUNE

Côtes De Bethune pick up the technique used to create the Côtes de Genève motif, but with a subtle difference: the decoration is symmetrically arranged to radiate out from the centre, thus calling for impeccable precision. The eye becomes a daunting judge that refuses to tolerate even the slightest flaw.

MIRROR  
POLISHING  
HAND-EYE  
COORDINATION

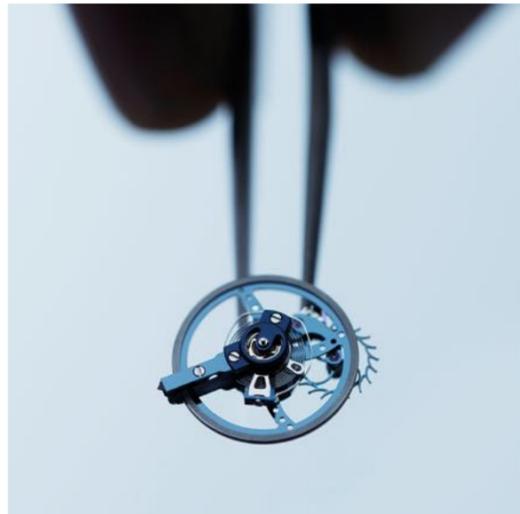
How long does it take to achieve perfection? Raised to an art form, mirror polishing is the kind of operation that only only an experienced hand-and-eye pairing can achieve, using diamond paste on a boxwood peg. Part by part, hand by hand, for hours on end. Failure is not an option.

## 26 CALIBRES IN 15 YEARS

A LEAGUE OF ITS OWN. ONE OF DE BETHUNE'S UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS IS ITS PERPETUAL ABILITY TO CHALLENGE ESTABLISHED TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ACHIEVEMENTS, CONSTANTLY SEEKING TO IMPROVE ON THAT WHICH ALREADY EXISTS. THE RESULT IS AN ALREADY SPECTACULAR TRACK RECORD.

Within the watch industry, the development of a new calibre has a place of its own. This operation is generally conducted on a large scale, involving colossal expense both for the development itself and for fine-tuning. The calibres are then used as widely as possible. De Bethune, however, makes calibres the way a pianist practices his scales. In 15 years, the small team has built no fewer than 26 – a spectacular accomplishment for such a modestly-sized company. Yet this clearly reflects the singular approach

adopted by Bethune and by its creative watchmaker, Denis Flageollet. The construction of each watch must bring something new to the table as well as demonstrating its aesthetic, thematic and technical legitimacy. The overarching mission is to participate in centuries of time measurement evolution and to contribute with the means afforded by the present age – driven as ever by the quest for constant improvement which often leads the team to think that the simplest option is to make a new calibre. |



### TOURBILLON TITANIUM & SILICON

Since 2002, De Bethune has revisited a number of techniques and components and explored an equally vast number of new technologies. One of the highlights to date came in 2004 with the development of a new titanium and platinum balance wheel, later reformulated with silicon: the ultimate match between heavyweight and lightweight materials designed to optimise the inertia of the balance-and-spring assembly. Vividly representative of the entire approach, this tourbillon model is the lightest on the market as well as boasting peerless precision thanks to its oscillation rate of 36,000 vibrations per hour.

#### DE BETHUNE CHAPTER II

## STRATEGIC REDEPLOYMENT FOCUSED ON FUNDAMENTALS

MANAGEMENT. PIERRE JACQUES HEADED THE COMPANY FROM 2011 TO 2015, BEFORE RETURNING WITH A GROUP OF SHAREHOLDERS IN THE AUTUMN OF 2017 – AND WITH THE CLEAR-CUT GOAL OF STRENGTHENING TIES WITH FINAL CUSTOMERS.

De Bethune is a youthful brand with an amazing story behind it and a bright future ahead of it. Following a difficult phase, the Manufacture is now back to its winning ways. In autumn 2017, the firm changed ownership with the arrival of a Geneva-based investment consortium, led by Pierre Jacques. The latter is well-acquainted with the warp and weft of De Bethune, much like the fabric of a suit he has already worn – since it was here, at the Manufacture located in the village of L'Auberson – that he learned his trade as a brand CEO from 2011 to 2015. And it was there that he fined-tuned his knowledge of the market, of customers and of retailers. His return sends a strong signal. For the 20-strong De Bethune personnel, it revives the mutual understanding cultivated over several years by Pierre Jacques and the creative watchmaker and soul of the Manufacture, Denis Flageollet. Inviting this man back on board was one of the first concrete effects of the new management's approach.

#### CONTINUITY IS THE WATCHWORD

On an external level, the renewal of this winning tandem also represents a token of reassurance eagerly awaited by the markets. Confidence is being restored, especially since the management is moving forward in pursuit of simple and transparent objectives, and devoid of any hint of arrogance. The first step is to strengthen ties with commercial partners, representing 30 or so of the world's most prestigious specialised retailers. De Bethune is a sophisticated brand that calls for retailers capable of addressing sophisticated connoisseurs and collectors, and Pierre Jacques is there to support these individuals through an active presence on the markets and by resto-

ring a sense of closeness with end customers.

Growth is of course on the agenda, but in moderate steps, as Pierre Jacques explains: "We have set ourselves the goal of reaching 200 watches per year by the end of a three-year period, without looking beyond that. We have understood that a headlong rush towards increased productivity is not for us. De Bethune is entering the age of reason and our vision is not about doing more, but doing better."

#### OPTIMAL MOMENTUM

As mentioned earlier, the stars definitely seem to have aligned to make this happen: people, finance, credibility, the business environment... Pierre Jacques was certain of this right from the start, but still had to persuade the other shareholders. With the support of private equity investor Giovanni Perin, he managed to find the right words: "I'm convinced that the mo-

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mentum is perfect for us, for the watch industry and for the global economy. We should be headed straight for success and the brand has everything it takes to achieve this."

#### REASONABLE AMBITIONS

The plan is therefore clearly not about restructuring nor even transforming the company, but rather about taking it as it is and picking up at the point where



PIERRE JACQUES. "We are lucky enough to enjoy horological credibility and a community of collectors on which we can rely."

things had come to a standstill, blocked by various contingencies such as the poor economic climate, the Russian crisis, the Euro crisis as well as an ever-growing distance from the markets – until the supply

vere difficulties, and all the major investments – with regard to the production facility and R&D – have already been made. The brand is in fact backed by an authentic, fully-integrated Manufacture that

brand such as De Bethune.

Meanwhile, the lynchpin of the company is still very much Denis Flageollet, the exceptional watchmaker who co-founded De Bethune in 2002 and made the brand an icon of the contemporary watch industry. Everything is dedicated to nurturing and leveraging his inventiveness. And everything possible is done to ensure the latter finds durable scope for expression – right the way through to the rigorously organised industrial production methods, albeit conducted on a very small scale, and despite the fact that handcraftsmanship continues to enjoy pride of place.

#### DEDICATED TO CREATIVITY

The Manufacture has already built a heritage to which few other companies can lay claim: 26 calibres developed in 15 years. These include major technical innovations relating to the regulating organ – the ultimate goal in this discipline, such as the titanium-platinum tourbillon and the De Bethune flat

terminal curve which replaces the Breguet overcoil on the end of the balance-spring, the beating heart of a mechanical watch.

Every possible effort is made to safeguard this lifegiving creativity on which, according to Pierre Jacques, the brand's very existence depends: "To continue progressing, our sole mission must be to innovate." That relates to more than just technical aspects. The quest for creativity and innovation genuinely affects the entire spectrum of horological expression: mechanics, construction, functions, decoration. Not to mention design, through the distinctive touch provided by Denis Flageollet, whose savoir faire covers the entire range of horological 'registers' – from ultra-traditional to ultra-futuristic.

All endeavours remain firmly focused on one sole objective: giving meaning to new inventions. Because as the watchmaker himself says: "My worst nightmare? A commercially successful model that would make no horological sense." |

# "A WATCH IS A FRAGMENT OF CULTURE ON THE WRIST"

INTERVIEW WITH DENIS FLAGEOLLET

THE HISTORY OF DE BETHUNE IS ROOTED IN A PASSION FOR TIME MEASUREMENT AND WATCHMAKING TRADITION, DRIVEN BY THE SIMPLE DESIRE TO EXPRESS SOMETHING OF ITS GRANDEUR WITHIN A CONTEMPORARY SETTING.

**D**enis Flageollet was not born in the Jura mountain region, yet watchmaking culture has always been in his blood. He has worked in restoration. He has cooperated with a number of brands alongside François-Paul Journe, his partner at THA (Techniques Horlogères Appliquées). However, his finest creation is De Bethune, launched in 2002 and thus named in tribute to a knight who was a passionate inventor. In fact, exactly like Denis Flageollet, with one foot firmly planted in culture, another in the future and his head very much in touch with his times. Denis Flageollet has become one of the industry's heritage figures, belonging to the category of independent creative watchmakers, and we were naturally keen to sit down for a talk.

#### How would you define De Bethune?

**DENIS FLAGEOLLET:** *The common thread has always been about building on a global, universal tradition of anything relating to time measurement: the Gothic period, the Renaissance with figures such as Jacopo Dondi and Jost Bürgi, along with French, English and German watchmaking, Harrison's marine chronometry, the work of cabinet-makers, the clocks of Robin, Passemant, Janvier – and indeed all the way back to the Mayas. The goal being to highlight historical themes and then bring these cultural elements firmly into the contemporary era.*

#### Is it a matter of reverence for the past?

*The aim is not only to provide a contemporary take on this tradition, but to add something more, to improve techniques or technologies, to reformulate a particular craft or provide an unprecedented aesthetic approach. To observe tradition from a new angle, a fresh standpoint, in order to make watches a wristworn fragment of time measurement culture.*

#### What are your favourite themes?

*Timekeeping precision, known as chronometry, is a good example.*

#### What is contemporary about this field?

*It involves a lengthy evolutionary process. The quest for high-precision mechanical means of measuring time dates back a long way, and for centuries, watchmakers singled out mechanisms to achieve this, whether in steeples, on tables or on gimbals. Subsequently, as accuracy improved, people wanted to be able to find simple ways of carrying these timepieces around. Today, this precision must be adapted to dealing with a wide variety of wearing conditions that are in some cases extreme. The ability to withstand impacts, accelerations, while remaining firmly strapped to an athlete's wrist: this is an extremely contemporary theme that involves cutting-edge research, just as we have previously undertaken on adjustment, the escapement, the balance wheel and the tourbillon. Tradition is constantly evolving.*

#### At the end of the day, the most striking aspect of De Bethune models is their highly distinctive, extremely modern design. Do you also see a connection with the past in this respect?

*Aesthetic and technical elements are inseparable. Take the case of another favourite theme: horology in the Age of Enlightenment, the era of the great 18th century engineers and of astronomy. To begin with, the aim was to make extremely beautiful scientific instruments, which the elite of the period wished to transform into works of art by having them adorned by the finest cabinet-makers, bronze-smiths and enamellers, with names like Boulle, Caffieri and Coteau.*

*We are also part of this evolution, while using modern methods. The dial of our DB25 Tourbillon (see page 1) is not in enamel but instead in blued titanium,*



**"WE HAVE ALWAYS BASED OUR WORK ON THE UNIVERSAL WATCHMAKING TRADITION. THE TOUGHEST PART IS TO MAINTAIN MEANING AND NOT MERELY TO MAKE WATCHES FOR THE PURPOSE OF BEING DIFFERENT."**

DENIS FLAGEOLLET

*endowing it with a more contemporary and even more intense hue than enamel.*

*It is absolutely not about merely replicating the past, but instead about recapturing what one feels when contemplating such exceptional objects. A truly stunning acrobatic feat that involves transposing the thrill of these great clocks to the wrist.*

*Watchmaking is part of a global culture and I see myself as an explorer. The cone stems from research into a shape that is omnipresent in nature.*

#### If everything is all things, does that mean anything is possible?

*Providing one sticks to logical models. Out of the vast melting pot of knowledge and culture, I draw inspiration from history, from peoples and from artisans. In the overlapping interactions between such elements, it can be hard to preserve their real meaning and not end up making watches whose only purpose is to be different: I'm not interested in making "toys for big boys".*

#### What actually is a watch that has meaning?

*The basis of a meaningful watch is that it must be pleasant to wear and useful in daily life. It must reflect a portion of the global body of knowledge represented by time measurement. It must contribute a touch of technical, cultural and aesthetic inspiration, and at the same time it must tell the time in a legible manner!*

#### Fair enough, but how is such a watch built? Where does one start?

*It all begins with a desire, a theme to be explored. Then you begin imagining the object: a few sketches give you a feel for what the watch should convey. After that I switch to 3D design software without trying to obtain a realistic picture, but just to put in place the techniques involved and the respective positions of the various elements. Moving directly from there to the prototype is a chance to place the object in a real-life environment as quickly as possible. In the workshop, the model lives alongside us and develops in tune with us. It is a matter*

*of taming it and adjusting it, using either CNC machining or hand craftsmanship.*

#### This kind of process is a far cry from the current methods that involve industrial conception of the prototype before actually making it.

*The human hand is super important! And I can't personally relate to the way in which watches are developed these days. It makes me feel uneasy, giving me the impression that something is missing – that the human touch is lacking.*

#### Your approach would be untenable without an integrated Manufacture and complete autonomy, wouldn't it?

*I'm not saying it's indispensable, but it's what I considered necessary and it does indeed help a lot. That being said, there are also certain inherent dangers in doing things this way: you need to be integrated, yet remain flexible. The key advantage of an integrated manufacturing facility is not being dependent on the standardisation imposed by others – which means one must not impose it in-house either.*

#### Isn't a certain degree of standardisation necessary in order to ensure quality?

*One has to bear in mind that a product must be reliable, but the parameters of this reliability must be adapted to each model and one should never be afraid to challenge existing procedures. Standardisation should be avoided, but not rigorous discipline.*

#### This formula doubtless works effectively in your case, since you are at the intersection between design and technology.

*I am indeed a kind of hybrid. When I began developing watches after the years I had spent restoring them, I was working on one-of-a-kind collector's models for the various brands I was dealing with, meaning people who had plenty of watchmaking experience but also an open-minded attitude. I derived great pleasure from making the connection between their ideas and technical feasibility, in ensuring that things worked. I have always felt at home somewhere between the two poles: creative, yet cautious. That being said, it's definitely not a one-man show, I need a team. An integrated Manufacture is first and foremost a team.*

#### Which brings me to my next question:

#### you developed 26 calibres in 15 years? Is that a 'sensible' pace?

*Let's say we're not very skilled at leveraging our assets. But it mostly reflects our passion for new ideas, a desire to keep making improvements, again and again. It doubtless also testifies to a somewhat monomaniac approach: doing the same thing over and over.*

#### One might say you make calibres just as others practice their scales?

*That's definitely true in some ways. All those who explore a profession are constantly practising their scales, be they artists or artisans. In our day-to-day work, the fact of having developed 26 calibres doesn't seem that amazing to us. You really have to look at the overall picture to be impressed by the accomplishment it entails.*

#### Another subject of curiosity: De Bethune is all about the sky and blueness.

#### What's the origin of this passion?

*The cosmos, time, the heavens above... When you want to observe time in motion without any instruments, you look upwards. This is a recurrent theme in watchmaking. As far as blue is concerned, it's also a watch industry tradition. Steel was originally blued to protect it from rust, before becoming a deliberately aesthetically pleasing element. We took the procedure even further when we realised titanium could also be blued: to stabilise our balance wheels, we heated them, they turned blue... and this discovery led us to the sky! |*

# 2018 CATALOGUE SELECTION

**BASELWORLD. AFTER ITS SHOWING IN GENEVA, DE BETHUNE IS PRESENTING TWO NEW REFERENCES AT BASELWORLD: THE DB27 TITAN HAWK V2 AND THE DB25 STARRY VARIUS.**

The DB27 Titan Hawk V2 was discreetly introduced last January on the fringes of the SIHH in a first version with a white dial (pictured on the cover). The

model is equipped with an original calibre, characterised by a firm focus on essentials, with a single barrel and a three-day power reserve. A watch serving as a gateway into the De Bethune world. At Baselworld, the Titan Hawk V2 is presented in a new interpretation, this time with a blue dial.

The other creation introduced at Baselworld, the DB25 Starry Varius, is an evolved version of the DB25T Milky Way, again featuring its central galactic theme, and in a 42 mm case. Even lighter, and even more classically handsome.



**BASELWORLD  
NEW MODELS 2018**

All details online.



## DB28 STEEL WHEELS

Over the years, the DB28 has become a classic for De Bethune. Interpreted with various contemporary stage-settings, from the "Skybridge" to "Kind of Blue", it notably won the prestigious Aiguille d'or (Best in Show) prize at the 2011 Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève. In January 2018, during Geneva's "Watch Week" coinciding with the SIHH, De Bethune took centre-stage by unveiling the unprecedented architecture of its movement through an exceptional timepiece: the DB28 Steel Wheels, issued in a 25-piece limited edition.

In this stunning model, De Bethune reveals cutting-edge technology dedicated to art: a self-regulating twin barrel ensures a six-day power reserve; a balance spring with De Bethune flat terminal curve; a silicon escape wheel, a triple *pare-chute* shock-absorbing system, and a new even more efficient titanium balance wheel with white gold inlays.



## DB28 KIND OF BLUE TOURBILLON

A monochrome version of the iconic DB28 Tourbillon. Its radical and mesmerising shade stems from a natural hand-crafted metal treatment. Each titanium or steel component has been individually and manually flame-blued according to its mass and its shape, using the traditional procedure. This technique has been known since the 16th century but used exclusively for steel and iron. De Bethune has succeeded in extending the technique to titanium, in its purest grade 5 formulation.



## DB25 PERPETUAL CALENDAR

The De Bethune take on the perpetual calendar is imbued with a sense of poetry and combines horological finesse with cutting-edge Manufacture-worthy mechanics by associating a moonphase, star-studded sky and perpetual calendar. The radiant hand-guiloché champagne-toned dial comprises 12 segments, while a titanium and blue steel sphere is enthroned at 12 o'clock in a star-studded sky, also incorporating a leap-year indicator. The 'engine' powering this model is the self-winding DB2324 QP calibre equipped with a self-regulating twin barrel, a triple *pare-chute* system and a titanium-platinum balance wheel.



## DB28 MAXICHRONO

The chronograph, the traditional instrument for measuring time, joins the contemporary line of DB28 watches. The result is a creation subtly combining classicism and modernism in its design, its architecture and its technical construction. It is first and foremost a contemporary chronograph featuring a mono-pusher on the 12 o'clock crown controlling five central hands mounted on the same pinion in a vertical chain of nested gear trains and pillars. A technical feat for the watchmaker, ensuring admirable simplicity for the user.



## DB25T MILKY WAY

First, the technical side: this model is equipped with an in-house tourbillon, an impressive 0.18g silicon-titanium technical accomplishment featuring a carriage spinning on its axis once every 30 seconds and a balance wheel oscillating at the rate of 36,000 vibrations per hour. It can be admired by turning the watch over, while the front displays jumping seconds, a tribute to the regulator-type dials of the Age of Enlightenment. The blued titanium night sky appears studded with stars and a gold-spangled Milky Way, encircled by an evocation of the most famous 18th century clocks through the silver hours and minutes ring that will acquire an exquisite patina over time.



## DB28 GRAND SPORT

A summit meeting between ultra-contemporary aesthetics and the quest for supreme reliability – of which shock resistance is a stern test that the watch passes with flying colours thanks to a triple *pare-chute* system, which protects the heart of its movement by means of a titanium bridge held by a spring-based system. Three jewels connect the various elements, serving not only to absorb shocks but also to secure the bridge in case of abrupt displacements. The model is also water-resistant to three full leagues under the sea. Its DB2115 calibre is equipped with a self-regulating twin barrel ensuring a six-day power reserve.



## DB25 WORLD TRAVELLER

A dual-time indication and a mysterious world time display. Each is independently controlled and the system is completely secure. Entirely in keeping with the De Bethune spirit, this apparently simple timepiece conceals a wealth of technical intelligence. Reference (home) time is shown by a microsphere, in tribute to the Manufacture's iconic moon phase, housed in a graduated channel. This half-blue, half rose-gold orb indicates day and night by turning over at 6am and 6pm.