

THE NEW MASTERS OF WATCH- MAKING

What makes the time lords tick? Alex Doak meets the watch world's key men

Ask any owner of a luxury watch why their timepiece is such an integral part of their wardrobe (and life), and they will reel off any number of facts and figures. But the truth of the matter is simple: a micro-engineered, hand-built timepiece is one of the ultimate status symbols.

And, even in these trying economic times, the market continues to prosper; 20 years ago Switzerland's luxury watch industry was worth £3bn. At the end of last year it was worth £6.3bn.

The boom, however, isn't all down to avid consumers. Behind the scenes there are the technical geniuses and artisans who design, build and continue to push boundaries in their craft. We introduce four of the most exciting men in watches.



Baumgartner dispensed with the old style of watches

The Maverick Designer

Felix Baumgartner, Urwerk

At 34, Felix Baumgartner is the young brain behind some of the most eye-catching creations money can buy. "My father was a clockmaker. His studio was on the same floor as my bedroom so, from the age of two or three, I was helping him clean and polish parts," he explains of how he got into the trade. But

the Geneva-based designer wasn't content with merely following in his father's footsteps. "By the Nineties, I'd quickly grown depressed," he reveals. "All my life I had simply been learning how to make a version of what has never been bettered for hundreds of years.

"As a 20-year-old, I faced a tough reality: either stop making watches

altogether or take a completely fresh direction." That direction involved ditching the usual mould – round face, three hands, 12 numbers – for some spectacular new designs. The UR-103, for example, employs numbered orbital satellites to tell the time.

"I'm inspired by the past but unashamed to employ the possibilities

of today," he enthuses. "Computer-aided design, industrial design, cinema, whatever – we do what we want." Take Urwerk's UR-101 – a collaborative effort with design partner Martin Frei that was inspired by *Star Wars'* Millennium Falcon.

"Because Martin lives in Zurich and I live in Geneva, we ping-pong our ideas – I come up with the mechanism, he comes back with the concept."

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Urwerk.com