

CHAPTER 3

PHILIPPE DUFOUR ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SIMPLE STICKS

Sticks are humankind's oldest tools. The fact that wooden sticks are still used in the manufacture of sophisticated machinery such as luxury watches is of particular fascination. Wood is uncomplicated, natural and has many near-magical properties. Of particular interest is that wooden sticks are used in one the most important aspects of high end watches — the fine finishing.

Watch nerds can enjoy endless debates on the relative merits of boxwood and beech for polishing pinion leaves, and gentian stalks versus elder sticks to buff up chamfers. For maximum effect, should the wood be harvested in spring, in autumn, or even at midnight during the full moon? It's an endless debate because there is no one correct answer.

Dominique Buser and Cyrano Devanthey had the opportunity to learn more about using wood for hand finishing by the master himself, Philippe Dufour. They joined Mr. Dufour in the Vallée de Joux to share his knowledge and experience, taking a seat at the workbench, by the master's side. Cyrano Devanthey explains, "To gain Mr. Dufour's trust, you have to show enthusiasm and seriousness. But once he is convinced, he opens up to you and shares his knowledge without restraint. Mr. Dufour hid nothing from us, and on the contrary, he revealed many of his secrets and techniques that make his timepieces so sought after. Mr. Dufour explained that you have to use all of your senses, including touch and sound, when aiming for perfection."

Gentian wood is used for the final polish. Its hard shell makes it resistant and its soft core is perfect for the final shine. Elderberry marrow with alcohol is then used to remove polishing residues because it doesn't mark the gleaming surface beneath.

The wood used here is a present from Philippe Dufour himself.