



ANATOMY OF A CLASSIC

# REF. 5002

Released in 2001, the Sky Moon Tourbillon was not only Patek Philippe's first double-faced grand complication for the wrist but also its first astronomical wristwatch and its most complicated. Nicholas Foulkes celebrates a landmark model

When it comes to appreciating the oeuvre of an artist, it is vital to understand the context in which the work was created. The year 2001 was important for Patek Philippe. Mankind had crossed the threshold of a new millennium, and it was a time for reflection. That year Philippe Stern realized a long-nurtured ambition: the Patek Philippe Museum opened in central Geneva. Widely acknowledged as the world's preeminent museum dedicated to horology, it is to watchmaking's past what the modern manufacturing H.Q. at Plan-les-Ouates is to horology's future. In the same year, Patek Philippe gave its customers a glimpse of the advancements in watchmaking when it launched the Sky Moon Tourbillon, its most complicated wristwatch at the time.

At Patek Philippe the past and the future are so closely linked that there are times at which they overlap. This happened in 1989 when the portable timepiece Calibre 89 re-launched a global taste for complicated mechanical watches, and it was apparent again at the turn of the millennium, with the introduction of the Star Caliber 2000. To see the latter as some sort of sequel to the Calibre 89 and as "another" complicated pocket watch is to miss its point entirely.

The Star Caliber is a big watch: it has 1,118 components and weighs more than five hundred grams, and yet it is also quite possibly Patek Philippe's subtlest watch. The model may have taken the external form of a classic supercomplication of the sort made for the tycoons of America's Gilded Age, but its internal world was a place of radical innovation. This was a watch of its time, as Philippe Stern made clear: "The approach of the year two thousand, that powerful symbol of progress, fired our imagination and our desire to surpass ourselves." As well as making a watch, Mr. Stern was building a temporal bridge to "link the past with the future." His aim was "not to integrate a maximum number of horological complications but, instead, to implement a combination of those previously thought to be unattainable."

The Sky Moon Tourbillon, REF. 5002, was developed alongside that impressive

supercomplication, making its appearance a few months later, in 2001. It offered the wrist-worn distillation of the essence of the Star Caliber, and it performed the philosophical feat of placing the mysteries of the cosmos quite literally within arm's reach. Made at a rate of two a year, the Sky Moon Tourbillon is unarguably one of the most important Patek Philippe wristwatches from any period in the manufacture's rich and eventful history.

With a dozen complications, it is the first double-faced watch made by the company and it presaged a period of extraordinary innovation across the industry as, during the first decade of the millennium, watchmakers experimented with new horological methods and functions. Yet, as strikingly innovative as it may have been, it was also familiar; the timepiece included two complications that Patek Philippe has made its own – the perpetual calendar and the minute repeater. The latter is characterized by a rich and lingering sound generated by

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a pair of cathedral gongs so long that each wraps around the circumference of the movement almost two times – but, in a break with tradition, the alloy with which they are made was expressly developed in conjunction with metallurgists of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne. Today, new materials are nothing "new," but this was almost 20 years ago.

The defining innovation of this watch is that it is, in effect, two timepieces inside one wearable case of 42.8 mm diameter. On the back of the case, an astronomical display of the moon, Sirius, and the Milky Way is indicated, along with sidereal time. Students of the marque would have been reminded of the famed Graves and Packard watches, which allowed those American plutocrats to place the heavens inside their pockets.

Now a further historical step had been taken, in moving the astronomical watch to the wrist. It was no easy achievement. Patek engineers had to calculate the optimum gear train ratios to ensure the greatest possible accuracy for all combined celestial displays, and there was, apparently, an entire universe of more than 25 trillion ratios to choose from. Again, as with "new" materials, watches with sophisticated astronomical displays of one sort or another have become popular in recent years, and it must be remembered that the development of this watch can be traced back to 1993, when the team that was to create the Star Caliber 2000 was first assembled. Only then can this watch's prescience be appreciated.

Indeed, much of what was said about the Star Caliber 2000 at the time of its launch can be applied to its wrist-worn sibling. Collectors then were encouraged to "think of it as a work of art with the heart of a complex scientific instrument" and as "a window opening onto the mysteries of the universe,

inciting us to become, in turn, philosopher, sage, and connoisseur of beauty."

But as well as allowing the mind to ponder the philosophical rewards to be derived from looking at the celestial vault in miniature and marveling at the smallness of man in the face of creation, it must also be understood that the spiritual dimension of this watch was only achieved with inspiration, daring, and innovation. Today the Sky Moon Tourbillon stands as a monument to an era of optimism and innovation. But innovation must not be confused with mere meretricious novelty. Novelty dates, whereas the truly innovative enters the classical canon, and the Sky Moon Tourbillon is most surely a canonical work. ♦

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