

Every year Patek Philippe brings out an array of special pieces whose decorations highlight rare handcrafts: they are mostly one of a kind or produced in a very limited series. These timepieces are usually unveiled at Baselworld, and the 2014 vintage was no exception. On entering the company's new airy glass and steel stand, visitors, clients, and devotees could feast their eyes on this collection of wristwatches, pocket watches, and dome table clocks featuring exceptional decoration. But that was merely a foretaste of what was to come later in that celebratory year. A second flowering, dedicated specifically to the 175th anniversary, was to dazzle the public once again in the fall, during October's festivities at the headquarters in Plan-les-Ouates.

Patek Philippe leads the field in two significant areas: cutting-edge horological technology and decoration by means of top-flight artistry and handcraftsmanship. This has long been known, but a reminder is never amiss, and the 175th anniversary collection embraced both facets to the full. And it is not by chance that the Grandmaster Chime, the collection's crowning horological achievement, pays such a marked tribute to the oldest of the decorative arts associated with watches, namely engraving.

As we might expect, engraving features prominently among the techniques honored in this collection dedicated to rare handcrafts. It appears alone or alongside other disciplines, particularly those great traditional Genevan specialties, enameling and miniature enamel painting.

Bewitched by this second flowering and marveling at its richness and diversity, the

viewer is also struck by how much planning must have been needed to create this special collection. In this demanding world of artistic inspiration and handcraftsmanship, nothing can be hurried.

Sandrine Stern, who led this grand collective undertaking, is happy to explain. "Of course we planned ahead, but above all, we knew that we could count on loyal colleagues and partners who were extremely motivated and committed – a 175th anniversary doesn't happen every day. They gave us all their time and talent. It was their shared passion that made this such a success." Work on the anniversary vintage was therefore able to forge ahead, without affecting the usual collections of either 2014 or 2015.

Drawing on the traditional techniques protected and nurtured by Patek Philippe, and in some instances, pushing beyond the limits of what was believed possible, this total dedication also produced some genuine firsts. It is common knowledge that the watchmaking industry is fueled by firsts. They are powerful growth engines, announced with great pride and made official by patents. But isn't it contradictory to speak of "firsts" in connection with rare handcrafts that are steeped in tradition?

"When it comes to rare handcrafts, Patek Philippe would never employ techniques or materials whose longevity – and therefore the longevity of, for instance, a dial – is open to question," says Sandrine Stern. "On the other hand, we want to stimulate the creativity of artists and skilled artisans, and encourage them to experiment with their talents and technique. Some of them do that spontaneously and innovate in their field. And



ON THE CREST OF A WAVE

It takes nerve and a bold vision to breathe new life into cherished traditional crafts. The head of watch creation at Patek Philippe, Sandrine Stern, talks to Jean-Philippe Arm about the genesis of a collection inspired by Lake Geneva, launched to celebrate the company's 175th anniversary





Master enameler Anita Porchet's technically accomplished decoration of the "Dawn on the Lake" pocket watch (pages 62-63) features miniature painting on enamel and *paillons*.

Opposite: wristwatches featuring rare handcraft techniques including cloisonné enameling, wood marquetry, miniature painting on enamel, and hand engraving.

Right: pocket watches decorated with miniature painting using finely ground enamel powder mixed with rare oils (top and bottom) and hand engraving (center)



from our side, we combine techniques, and therefore artisans, in new ways, and the results can be genuine firsts."

Anita Porchet produced one of the jewels of the 175th anniversary collection, a piece that exceeds the accepted limitations of her art. Porchet, a master of all the enameling techniques, chose two – miniature painting and *paillonné* enameling – and combined them so closely that they can almost be said to have fused. She applied her vision and artistic approach to all the surfaces of the piece, a pocket watch entitled "Dawn on the Lake," as well as the stand.

The entire piece pays tribute to the Swiss painters of Lake Geneva, whose works are to be found in the personal collection of Philippe Stern. One of his favorite paintings, *Morning off Cologny* by Louis Baudit, is represented on the back of the watch. On the dial side, Porchet achieved the technical feat of uniting in perfect harmony works by five painters: Alexandre Perrier, Edouard Vallet, Walter Maffi, Ferdinand Hodler, and Paul Klee. "The further I got," says the artist, "the more I had the feeling that I was 'navigating' in the dial." The viewer's eye moves fluidly from one painting to the next, among reflections and colors whose myriad shades melt into each other. More than 40 basic enamel colors contributed to that effect. Since the paintings are unframed, the sense of flow is uninterrupted. The decoration spills onto the engraved white gold bezel, where spangles, or *paillons*, continue the theme, each one individually painted after being embedded.

For some of the colors, such as the shifting blues, greens, and turquoise of the water, Porchet opted for silver spangles, which pose a far greater technical challenge than the more familiar gold variety. "I knew this was madness and that I was going to suffer, but without them, I would never have achieved the effect I was seeking." One of the pitfalls of combining spangles and miniature painting is that each process requires a different firing temperature. Thanks to its creator's vast experience – and a few sleepless nights – the piece was a success. Porchet's daring was rewarded when the final mirror polish revealed the elusive nuances particular to the lake. In the words of the artist, enchanted by the result, "It's exactly the feeling you get from nature."

Lake Geneva, with its traditional sailing boats (known as barques), harbors, and shore, together with the city itself, forms the theme of this 175th anniversary collection. Among the most remarkable interpretations are the following pieces.

Demonstrating the art of miniature painting on enamel, the dials of two of the Calatrava wristwatches in the set entitled "On the Lake" are created after works by the Swiss painter François Boccion. It is important to note that some of the visual effects in the sky and the water were obtained by fine hand engraving of the background prior to the enameling.

A set of four Calatrava wristwatches depicting "Lake Geneva Barques" also have dials inspired by paintings in the Philippe Stern





collection, but this time interpreted in cloisonné enamel. The fine gold wire that contains the enamels is a mere 0.05 millimeters in thickness with a length of some 40 to 70 centimeters.

The Lake Geneva barques feature again in compositions inspired by vintage postcards and expressed in wood marquetry for a further set of four Calatrava wristwatches. As many as 30 different species of wood were used, and each dial comprises up to 166 individual pieces. In another set of four Calatravas entitled “Breeze and Storm,” the fine old barques take center stage once more, as does Geneva harbor. Here, the white gold dials are fully hand engraved using the low relief or *en modelé* technique. Along with the other Calatravas, these house the ultra-thin self-winding caliber 240.

Lastly, this selection must include “The Neptune,” a dome table clock in which the themes of lakeside, sailing, and Geneva are interpreted in *plique-à-jour* enamel. Imagine the process of piercing the entire circular, convex metal surface and filling the innumerable openings thus created with the colored translucent enamels, the latter held in place solely by capillarity, with no solid backing. The technique is familiar. But to transfer it from the size of a dial to that of a table clock requires daring. At the ripe old age of 175, Patek Philippe is clearly not lacking in that. ♦

Translated by Barbara Caffin

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“The Bol d’Or” dome table clock (page 66, right), decorated in cloisonné enamel, takes its theme from the famous regatta on Lake Geneva. Patek Philippe honorary president Philippe Stern, a respected regatta skipper, achieved a distinction at the event on seven occasions. Left (and detail on page 66, left): “The Neptune” is the first Patek Philippe dome table clock to feature *plique-à-jour* enameling – a rare technique where the artisan cuts openings in the metal in a honeycomb-type pattern, which are then filled with colored translucent enamels that let the light pass through. This creates an attractive stained glass effect