

# PURE AND SIMPLE

In a complicated world, some things are best kept simple. Patek Philippe introduces a new minimalist model to its signature collection as the Calatrava turns eighty. Jean-Philippe Arm reports

**Apart from a jeweled timepiece** whose glittering charms eclipsed all technical considerations, almost all of the 20 or so new models presented by Patek Philippe at Baselworld in spring 2012 housed at least a small horological complication. The brilliant lineup ranged from calendars to minute repeaters, chronographs, and tourbillons, together with World Time and astronomical indications. The one exception: the REF. 5123 was a perfectly simple piece with three hands and a manually wound movement. Its difference alone is reason enough to appraise this Calatrava, whose arrival coincided with the eightieth anniversary of this noble line. With this watch, we penetrate to the very heart of Patek Philippe's tradition and identity. And if there is one person who can tell us more about it, that is Philippe Stern.

Patek Philippe presents two distinct faces to the world, reflecting two routes that the company follows. One is innovation, leading to highly specialized technical developments. Examples in recent years include the Spiromax®, the Pulsomax®, and the GyromaxSi®, promising and decisive advances affecting the regulating organ of mechanical movements – the balance spring, the escapement, and the balance respectively. The second route is tradition, which is expressed continually through models and collections that retain their links with the company's past. What does each of these two directions represent for Patek Philippe's honorary president?

**PHS:** Those are indeed our two chosen routes (though I would add a third, devoted to sports watches, the Nautilus and Aquanaut collections). We have a history of making complicated watches, where innovation is the driving force. Every year we bring out new movements, further complicating already complicated mechanisms; for example, adding a fly-back hand to a chronograph movement. Our Advanced Research department also works tirelessly to improve the chronometric precision and reliability of our products.

**J-PA:** This interest in complications and innovations is illustrated by a series of new models. And then there is the REF. 5123, which



The rose gold REF. 5123 echoes the pure lines and pared-down design of the original Calatrava model launched in 1932.

The manually wound movement, caliber 215 PS, is visible through the sapphire crystal caseback (below)

looks to the past, to classicism and simplicity. Why, and how, does one conceive a new Calatrava? What distinguishes it from previous models? One senses that the changes required a delicate touch.

**PHS:** To us, it is very clear: this has to be a simple round watch that, when worn on the wrist, will be recognized immediately as a Patek Philippe Calatrava. It must be beautiful in itself, without artifice. The difficulty lies in allowing the collection to evolve while preserving its style. That can only be achieved by the smallest, most subtle changes. This model is inspired by one from the 1950s.

**J-PA:** Do you work mainly on the dial or the case to bring a traditional model up to date?

**PHS:** Here, the dial is still silvery opaline – I would say neutral – with applied gold hour markers of rectangular shape, with two facets. We simplified the seconds display by retaining only a cross to mark the four quarters. That had already been done in the past, of course. This piece has been refined even further. It is perhaps more distinguished and more understated.

**J-PA:** It looks very slim, with a large dial, for a diameter of 38 mm. You have worked on the case as well?

**PHS:** Yes, extensively, and particularly on the chamfered case side and back. The construction is unusual, with shorter, lower lugs, so that the bezel, also quite slender, emerges from its surroundings. When you seek the greatest simplicity and purity of line, you must avoid adding superfluous material.

**J-PA:** And the same restraint inside the case: the movement is manually wound.

**PHS:** Some customers love to put new life into their watch by winding the movement. It's a ritual, and they would never dream of wearing a self-winding watch. Surprisingly, given today's technological possibilities, that clientele is growing, even among the young.

**J-PA:** I gather that this model was extremely well received at Baselworld.

**PHS:** The response was excellent. I knew from experience that a model like this would have broad appeal. The fact is, simplifying a watch is a difficult task. It is easier to add extraneous features to the dial or case.

**J-PA:** The general public, which follows your news with much interest, is obviously attracted to the highly complicated watches that Patek Philippe produces. But not everyone has the means to acquire what is inevitably a

very expensive object. In bringing out a simple model, was there the desire to approach a broader customer base?

**PHS:** Yes, of course. And those customers are delighted to be offered a watch that is faithful to the Patek Philippe tradition, with the same quality of workmanship as all the other watches and a movement designed and built according to the rules of traditional horology.

**J-PA:** Does that mean a model like this can be produced in larger numbers?

**PHS:** Absolutely not! All our lines are produced in small quantities. We increase our production slightly every year, but it remains modest.

**J-PA:** You were deeply involved in creating this perfectly simple Calatrava.

**PHS:** Yes, but when it comes to creation we work as a team, my daughter-in-law, my son and I, and we take decisions together. We wanted to create a very simple product and to give a new look to the Calatrava. I was mainly concerned with the dial. This required delving into the past, especially the 1950s and 1960s, when clean, uncluttered dials were in vogue. In fact, it is a classic design, and that is something that never goes out of style.

**J-PA:** Beneath its air of timeless beauty, this Calatrava conceals a movement that is clearly no longer the 1932 version or even the 1950s one but very much of the 2000s. The balance spring in the caliber 215 PS movement is made from Silinvar®, an antimagnetic material derived from silicon that has been gradually introduced into the current collection since 2008.

**PHS:** We belong to the tradition of watchmakers who have always sought to improve their products and systems. Today, similarly to when Invar was introduced, not only is it essential to incorporate silicon into a component as important as the balance spring, it is acknowledged as such without question.

Tradition or innovation? Another question that no longer need be asked when innovation is a tradition.✦

*Translated by Barbara Caffin*

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