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# Faces for our 80th anniversary

*The watch industry is, above all, a vast community of men and women who work, day-in day-out, at imagining, elaborating, producing, decorating, distributing and selling watches. Europa Star, which is celebrating its 80th anniversary this year, has decided to render a symbolic homage to all these players in the watch world, whether they are CEOs or simple artisans, creators or salespeople. There will be 80 faces among tens of thousands to be discovered throughout the year.*

## Vianney Halter – independent master watchmaker

At a time when nearly everyone is proclaiming to be an 'independent', it is rare to find a truly independent watchmaker, one who is independent in mindset as well as in creativity. There can be no doubt that Vianney Halter falls into this rare category. You only have to walk through the door of his manufacture—the Janvier manufacturing facility, named after Antoine Janvier, one of the most extraordinary watchmakers in history—to understand that Vianney Halter's type of timekeeping is totally unique. Unlike any other, his facility is a combination of a Jules Verne laboratory, an industrial structure, and an alchemist's atelier. Here, with his team of watchmakers, precision engineers, and designers, Halter creates timepieces that are original and surprising, that don't fall into a conventional category.

This anti-conformist creator established his own brand in 1994, in Sainte-Croix, in the Jura mountains of the canton of Vaud. Born in 1963 near Paris, son of a train conductor (perhaps this explains his fascination with mechanical things), he entered the watchmaking school in Paris at the age of 14. With diploma in hand, he rapidly started his own business, and opened a restoration workshop in the French capital. For six years, he restored historically valuable pieces dating from 1550 to the 1980s, acquiring an encyclopedic knowledge of timekeeping.

In 1990, he moved to Switzerland where he collaborated notably with his friend, François-Paul Journe, and designed complications for a number of grand Swiss brands. In 1998, he was welcomed into the Academy of Independent Horological Creators (Académie des Créateurs Horlogers Indépendants, ACHI). Since he created his own brand, Vianney Halter, he has continued to surprise the industry with creations such as: the Artigian, with its display divided over four separate windows; the Trio, with its similar windows divided over a rectangular case, and its mysterious oscillating weight and more recently, the Janvier Moon and Sun, with its time equation and lunar cycles. The list of highly original pieces, with ingenious and original movements, all evoking technical poetry, is a long one.

In the world of watches, increasingly dominated by the large luxury empires, a creator such as Vianney Halter is and will remain indispensable. He brings a touch of fantasy, a scent of poetry, and a touch of our childhood. (PM)



## Ronald Jackson – President, Girard-Perregaux and JeanRichard USA

Ron Jackson started working with Zale's Jewellers right after he graduated from college and he has been in the watch industry ever since. After Zale's, he worked for Jaz Paris watches, a division of Mattori Selko, then Hamilton and he is currently President of Girard-Perregaux and JeanRichard in the USA.

"I've always been fascinated with watches," he says.

"Even in grade school, I had a passion for watches. I've always enjoyed the look and feel of a nice watch, and I've always appreciated the mechanical aspect of watches. I am a gear head - I like gears in watches, bicycles, motorcycles and cars."

Jackson really enjoys his job, relishing the different aspects of what he does. One of the things he enjoys most is working on the timepieces from Girard-Perregaux and JeanRichard. He has developed many US-only models and Jackson loves rolling up his sleeves and digging into the design and feature sets. "Not only do I get to work with the product, which I really love, but I have the opportunity to work with tremendously interesting retailers from all around the country," he details. "I have also had the chance to work with interesting projects with Ferrari, the Colorado Grand, the American LeMans series, the Grand Am series, BMW Orade Racing and the American Nicaragua Foundation."

When Jackson is not working, he can be found with his family, on the mountain bike trails or at the controls of something fast. "The only thing I don't like is that as much as I enjoy what I do, there is a ton of travel," he says. "I go somewhere, enjoying myself doing interesting work with great people, but I am away from my family."

Jackson is concerned about the future of the watch industry. "The biggest issue we face in the watch industry is how to cultivate and protect the authorized distribution of our products," he says.

On the product side, Jackson is very optimistic. "Both our brands have advanced product development already on-line for deployment in 2008 and beyond," he says. "The products for the future are sure to continue the legacy of Girard-Perregaux and JeanRichard, and we look forward to improving our ability to match the strength of our companies with the tastes of watch connoisseurs." (KWS)

## Françoise Bezzola – Director of communication

Françoise Bezzola doesn't flaunt her game. But don't be fooled, she knows perfectly well what 'game' she is playing. Blasé people will find her to be blasé, while those who are the most knowledgeable will understand very quickly that, in the colourful landscape of public relations, Françoise Bezzola not only knows exactly what

she is talking about, but that she also has a very strong influence. Director of Communication at Zenith, since its purchase by LVMH, she is also a member of the executive committee and 'reports' directly to the dynamic and very demanding Thierry Nataf. At his side, she has developed and launched five complete collections of watches, accompanied by a media whirlwind of films, music, and documentation, which have strongly contributed – a veritable electro-shock – to the renaissance of what was once a 'sleeping beauty'. This true success story was conducted with as much seriousness as charm. Mission accomplished at Zenith, she is now going to exercise her talents with another LVMH brand: TAG Heuer.

A native of Geneva, she earned a degree in International Relations. Françoise Bezzola cut her teeth at the austere Swiss Bank Corporation. She later took on the top job in communications at Gérald Genta and Daniel Roth (still under the umbrella of Hour Glass), followed by a stint at Versace watches, before landing at Zenith in 2002.

All of her irony, her reserve, and her humour are revealed in her own 'secret garden', which is her writing, a vocation she practices as discreetly as she does regularly. One of her novels, 'Ride et châtiement' was just awarded a prize in the Femina literary competition. The judges declared that her work was "funny, lively, and offered a refined philosophy under the guise of superficiality." We told you so... (PM)



## Jan Edöcs – CEO of Milus International SA

No one expected Milus to return to the forefront in timekeeping. Created in 1919, Milus struggled to survive the great crisis that swept away so many of its competitors. Courageously, the last descendent of the founding family, Paul Junod, its designer, tried to make the brand a model in terms of design and modernity. But he was ahead of his time. Shamelessly copied by the fashion brands during the 1990s, the brand was highly regarded, but Junod was not able to transform its critical success into commercial success.

The brand would have collapsed had not the Hong Kong group, Peace Mark, purchased it and placed it under the direction of Jan Edöcs. The ideal man for the job, Edöcs was born in 1971 in Bienne. His experience included sales and marketing for Omega, before he joined Milus in 1996 as its director of sales and marketing. In 2002, he was appointed by the new owners to the position of CEO.

In a short time, Jan Edöcs succeeded in brilliantly revitalizing the brand while conserving its strong identity in terms of design. Although Milus does not evoke the *avant-garde* rigour of its previous designs, its models differ from ordinary watches by the purity of their lines, their elegance, and their originality. Yet they still remain faithful, in their own way, to Milus' DNA, but now they are more commercial.

Even better, Jan Edöcs has succeeded in creating an original and strong universe around the brand, thanks to a marketing campaign that is subtle, powerful, and one that attracts a lot of attention. 'Highly Personal' affirms the text below the superb photos, which show carefully chosen 'testimonials' where the person's eyes are closed. It is an effective way to convey the message that true richness is on the inside before it is visible on the outside.

Jan Edöcs also must be credited with another success. Milus is perhaps the first 'brand' that has succeeded under Chinese control. Before, none of the owners from China had been able to revitalize, for the long term, a Swiss brand that they had purchased. And, the headquarters is still in Bienne. (PM)



## Raymond Weil – Founder of Raymond Weil SA



When in 1976, at the age of 50, Raymond Weil announced his intention to launch his own brand, under his own name, everyone said he was "crazy." Wasn't the Swiss watch industry in grave turmoil and about to be drowned by the flood of Japanese watches?

But, as he himself says with a smile, "I didn't know anything about making ladies' underwear or any other product, for that matter. I only knew watches. So, I didn't listen to anybody. I just forged ahead."

After 27 years of very good and very loyal service to a company called Camy, Raymond Weil was dismissed by a descendent of the founding family who wanted to apply "new methods" to the brand. In fact, all this new owner did was to definitively destroy the enterprise.

Along with his colleague, Simone Bédard, Raymond Weil showed all the naysayers that they were wrong. Debuting with an embryonic collection, he developed the brand at a speed that surprised everyone in the industry. His secret? "I love the product," he exclaims. "Watches are wonderful to design, produce, and sell." A formidable salesman, Raymond Weil had a particular gift. He knew how to form strong, friendly, convivial, and nearly family-like relationships with his retailers and agents. In a short time, he succeeded in creating a world network, remaining constantly available, open, and flexible to his customers.

In 1982, after passing his pilot's license, he felt it was time to "consolidate things", just in case something should happen to him. He therefore hired his son-in-law, Olivier Bernheim, who has continued the successful development of the brand, as we know. Today, the family destiny and proud independence are assured with the entry onto the scene of Raymond's grandchildren, Pierre and Elie. This makes Raymond, who is now in his 80s, very happy. He still goes to the office every day.

He doesn't take part in daily operations, he says, so what does he do? He does what he has always done. "I look after the customer. I call around the world, solve little problems, and maintain the flame of friendship." And, sometimes, he goes to the after-sales service department, takes a random file and, as he has done for many decades, telephones to a surprised client: "Hello, this is Raymond Weil, himself. I am calling you personally to let you know that your watch will soon be ready..." (PM)

## Melissa Oster – Co-Owner Oster Jewelers



Melissa Oster, Co-Owner of Oster Jewelers (Denver, Colorado, USA), started in the watch industry when she went on buying trips with her husband, Jeremy, who was managing a jewellery store. "I grew to enjoy the business," she says. "We quickly reached a point when we decided that we should have our own jewellery and watch boutique and opened our own store in Denver 5 years ago."

"I became fascinated with watches when visiting the Parmigiani watch factory in Switzerland. It was there that I was exposed to the reality that all watches are not created equally and finish and quality is what sets them apart. I was captivated by the amount of work involved in creating a watch; from the design to the hand finishing of each little screw to introducing it to the world. Fine watches are truly miniature works of art. The watch industry is very small and I enjoy the relationships which we have established within the industry and with many of our clients." Business is very good for Oster and she feels that it will only continue to grow. "The demand for higher quality and unique pieces is greater than ever," she says. "Consumers are more knowledgeable about watches which is creating a demand for more sophisticated timepieces."

One of the problems facing the industry is the lack of timely delivery, or even information on delivery dates. "The manufacturers need to offer their retailers real production/delivery schedules," Oster says. "As a retailer we need to be provided with accurate information so that we can advise our customers with regard to delivery. At Oster, we now carry over 20 watch brands as you cannot count on any one or two brands to supply the watches needed by the consumers and too few companies can give realistic delivery schedules. The manufacturers also have a responsibility to monitor their distribution channels to ensure that consumers' investments are protected and not undermined by grey-market traders. From a retailer's perspective, manufacturers need to think about how important the retailer is to their overall business plan. With manufacturers opening their own boutiques, the retailer is in direct competition in selling the same brand." Retailers have their share of the work however. "Retailers in general still need to do a better job of educating the consumers," Oster admits. "Many people walk into our store and don't even know how to operate the watches they purchased from some of the best known stores! We would never allow this. At Oster, we go to great lengths to convey the passion that separates the smaller artisans from the larger manufacturers. It is our belief that it is the smaller companies like Parmigiani and Bovet that will set the standard for quality and originality in the future and we excel at introducing these up and coming houses to our collectors." (KWS)