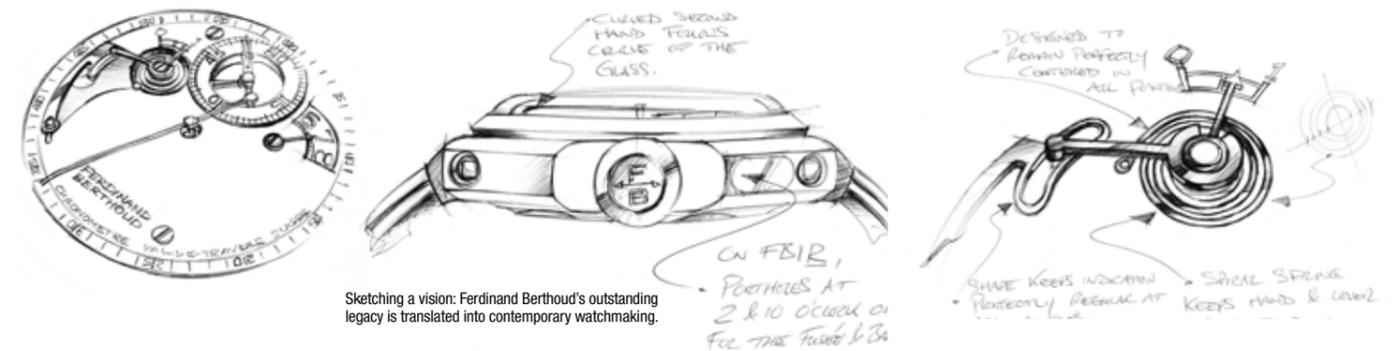




The novel construction of the Chronomètre Ferdinand Berthoud IR.6-1 sets it apart from all existing regulator-type displays.

METICULOUSLY CRAFTED

An ambitious vision to express the very highest values of haute horlogerie sees the legacy of master watchmaker Ferdinand Berthoud brought back to life.



Sketching a vision: Ferdinand Berthoud's outstanding legacy is translated into contemporary watchmaking.

by Jola Chudy

The carefully guarded values of haute horlogerie are occasionally susceptible to the kind of embellishment often associated with the phrase 'haute couture' or 'bespoke'. Much like the word 'luxury', the phrase is sometimes applied to a watch whose values of high craftsmanship are, shall we say, a little outside the stringent values of what constitutes a true haute horlogerie timepiece.

Ferdinand Berthoud cannot be accused of such an inaccuracy. Indeed, the brand that is the passion project of one of high watchmaking's most successful protagonists – Mr Karl Friedrich Scheufele, co-President, along with his sister Caroline, of Maison Chopard – has expressed the values of haute horlogerie so successfully since launching in 2015, that its pieces have consistently garnered the top prizes in watchmaking.

"Our timepieces are direct heirs to the work of Ferdinand Berthoud, infused with the same ethos of innovation and precision, reinterpreted from a contemporary standpoint," says Karl-Friedrich Scheufele of his venture. "Over the years, I collected some masterpieces of this horological genius and now give a new lease on life to this exceptional heritage."

Just to refresh your memory, haute horlogerie is a slightly nebulous term used to define a watch that may be considered exceptional. Much like the hand-finished creations of Chanel, with stitching techniques from storied Parisian ateliers, or the Savile-Row cut suit that has been made to its owner's unique specifications, a haute horlogerie watch sits atop the pinnacle of watchmaking. It is the best example in its category, whether by dint of complication, beauty, craftsmanship or a masterful mix of the three.

Haute Horlogerie status is bestowed upon brands that manufacture challenging complications such as tourbillons, minute repeaters, astronomical complications, chronographs, perpetual calendars and so forth. However, the presence alone of a complication does not qualify a watch to lay a claim to high watchmaking status. Factors such as finishing

and decoration come into play – if the watch is decorated by hand, using a centuries-old technique, and finished on its visible and hidden parts with exceptional attention to detail, this also indicates its elevated status amongst timepieces. For those with more than a passing interest in this area of watchmaking, the Foundation Haute Horlogerie, founded in 2005, is an independent body dedicated to recognising the brands that attain this rarefied status. It is no surprise to learn, upon closer inspection, that Ferdinand Berthoud is amongst the brands squarely regarded by the organisation as worthy of the category (in case you're wondering, brands such as Rolex and Patek Philippe don't quite make the final cut, sitting outside that golden circle in an inferiority-complex-generating category of 'perimeter brands').

So – what's so magnificent about Ferdinand Berthoud, and why should you, dear watch aficionado, be doing your utmost to strap one of these incredibly rare watches to your wrist?

A little historical context first. Ferdinand Berthoud, the watchmaking genius who lends his name to the modern-day iteration of his brand, was a visionary scientist and watchmaker. He was appointed Master Watchmaker by the French Royal Court in 1752 and distinguished himself through his work on sea chronometers for the Navy as well as by designing and building various ingenious clocks and instruments. He wrote and documented a vast body of work throughout his lifetime, which contributed significantly to the scientific developments of the Age of Enlightenment. A skilled inventor, he wrote and disseminated his knowledge voraciously until his death in 1808.

Karl-Friedrich Scheufele, fascinated by this early predecessor, has collected some of Berthoud's original creations and became determined to revive the name, by creating watches worthy of the inventor's name. The watches he and his team conceptualised draw inspiration from their eponymous inspiration thanks to their distinctive style and peerless

technical and aesthetic quality. They're made in Fleurier, the heart of Swiss watchmaking, and from the beginning have been intended to be certified at the highest standards of contemporary watchmaking.

One of the newest additions is the Chronomètre FB-1R.6-1. This big, 44mm statement piece is the latest in the Chronomètre FB family and, like its predecessors, is inspired by the scientific instruments made by Berthoud himself several centuries ago. This piece in particular takes its cues from Marine Chronometer No 7 and is issued in a 20-piece limited edition collection. The hand-wound movement features 18 nickel silver bridges framed by polished titanium pillars, a construction typical of 18th century marine chronometers. The watch features both a fusée-and-chain and a tourbillon – one of just a few watches ever made to feature both due to the sheer amount of room needed for each – perhaps in retrospect that 13.95mm thickness and 44mm diameter is actually quite small, considering what's packed inside.

Every aspect of its design, movement and finishing reflects Scheufele's uncompromising approach to excellence. The case comprises two octagonal, stainless steel side pieces, lending it a characteristic shape. In addition to the sapphire crystal caseback, there are two 'portholes' at 2 and 11 o'clock, which allow the wearer to peer inside and see the movement from the side as well. And what a movement it is. Scheufele has put one of horology's most difficult technical complications, a chain-and-fusée mechanism, centre stage. The barrel and fusée are gilded and the 790-part stainless steel chain measuring 285, long is entirely hand-finished. Particularly notable is the inverted upside-down barrel and fusée, with both elements held on only one side. When the mainspring is combined with a fusée, the barrel drum turns in one direction when the spring is unwinding and in the other when it is winding, coiling the chain. To prevent the movement from stopping

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when it does this, the FB-T.FC.R calibre is equipped with a differential gear that enables the balance wheel to continue oscillating during winding and thereby maintain the movement's precision timekeeping properties.

Unlike its predecessors, this latest timepiece has a mostly solid dial that in fact is the rear side of the complication

plate which provides the regulator-type display. The seconds are shown around the rim of the dial on a flat inner bezel ring of black rhodium-plated chamfered nickel silver.

Fashioned from nickel silver and painstakingly brushed by hand, it is also black rhodium-plated. A small aperture shows the hours, the second displays the power reserve and the third a hand-engraved pyramid-style motif inspired by a clock made by Berthoud himself. The power reserve is visible through a cut-out in the half-bridge on the caseback and comprises a cone that moves along an arbor connected to the barrel – the patent pending on this feature affirms the uncompromising ingenuity and ambitious mathematical complexity lavished upon the watch.

The watch is composed of a steel cylinder housing the movement, a steel reinforced by a thermo-chemical process making it virtually unscratchable. *Revolution* tried. While at SIHH, we popped into the booth and did our darndest to inflict damage on a (sample) case, using a sharp needle. We failed, and it's not just because we are as weak as a mosquito. The metal really doesn't scratch. With a price tag approaching the price of a luxury supercar, we're not entirely sure if owners will be willing to try this particular parlour trick with determined vandals. In any case – its high performance credentials are assured. In a pleasing contrast, the cutout bridges are made of untreated nickel silver, a beautifully shiny alloy that is extremely fragile, and has been decorated by hand with the utmost care. Any damage to those is permanent. Thank goodness for that super-strong case, then. ★



As typically found on chain and fusée mechanisms, the barrel of Calibre FB-T.FC.R is equipped with a "Maltese Cross" stopwork device. The latter serves to limit the winding turns of the mainspring to around six, so as to use only the most stable portion of this spring.



MOVEMENT

Mechanical hand-wound Calibre FB-T.FC.R.

CASE

44mm case in ultra-resistant carburised stainless steel, fitted with two transparent sapphire crystal portholes.

DIAL

Regulator plate (dial) in black rhodium-plated nickel silver, satin-brushed by hand. Hours indication on

a sapphire disc at 2 o'clock. Minutes subdial at 12 o'clock, cut-out, bead-blasted, rhodium-plated and bearing black Arabic numerals. Dagger-shaped faceted and openworked minutes hand in 18-carat white gold with blue CVD coating.

STRAP

Rolled-edge hand-sewn alligator leather strap made from a single piece of leather. Length-adjustable double-blade titanium folding clasp – Pin buckle available on request.



The stainless steel arrow-shaped tourbillon bridge is decorated with the utmost care. This tourbillon contributes to earning Calibre FB-T.FC.R its chronometer title awarded by the Swiss Official Chronometer Testing Institute (COSC).

