



The movement of time

Swiss clockmaker L'Épée 1839 has always been a pioneer, marrying precision engineering with creative designs that entice its many collectors

Time has always been the most precious commodity, for which clocks themselves have had to evolve. Swiss clockmaker L'Épée 1839 has demonstrated a creative and inventive spirit of evolution since its foundation and has won an unprecedented six gold medals at World Fairs. It produces immaculate traditional carriage clocks and a range of timepieces that are playful works of art, intricately designed and constructed from hundreds of unique hand-crafted parts to resemble spaceships, planes, firearms, skulls and elaborate spider-like sculptures.

"It's about creativity," says Arnaud Nicolas, the company CEO and Artistic Director. "We have always been at the forefront of design and technical skill, but what we are doing now is making table clocks that are works of art. For somebody to want a carriage clock it needs to be a piece of art that somehow has a secondary function or tells the time in a different way. What we are doing is what the French call the *métier d'art*. It means, literally, the work or craft of art and is about a maker's intention to create an artwork by hand in a special way, giving value to an object. It is craft, but not all craftsmanship is *métier d'art*."



L'Épée 1839 makes formal carriage clocks – stunning clocks with mechanical movements housed in minimalist casing – and creative clocks that are about fantasy and fun while maintaining a tradition of impeccable technical skill. The company's latest design, the Time Fast II, is based on a 1960s Formula One car. Incredibly detailed and brilliantly conceived, it is partly inspired by the pull-back toy cars of Nicolas' childhood, using the same process to create kinetic energy to wind the movement once a week. The clock is constructed using the same methods and materials as a Formula One car, with the time displayed on the engine. The ignition key, engine, steering wheel, gear stick, driver's helmet – all are engineered to play a fundamental role in the clock's workings just as they do with a car. "Every piece of art has to express something," he says. "That is the point of art – it is not simply to be nice. It must give emotion, it must inspire. That is what we try to do with our clocks. We want to transport people to their childhood."

It's this mixture of ingenuity and humour that ensures these limited pieces are in high demand. Historically, L'Épée 1839 clocks

have been presented as gifts to guests at royal weddings, and the company also fitted the first wall clocks for Concorde in 1976. "For many years we were called the 'brand of the powerful' because most of the powerful men and women in the world had a L'Épée clock," says Nicolas. "They were given to royalty, presidents, prime minister and great entrepreneurs."

The company can produce bespoke pieces from its existing catalogue by personalising or customising them, or one-of-a-kind pieces made to an individual's specifications. "Recently I had a customer who wanted a clock built exactly like his favourite racehorse, but in clock form," he says. "This was not easy, but we now have 60 engineers and watchmakers who can design and build such things. L'Épée has always been at the forefront of making clocks as decorative objects, but we add a humorous twist. We have kept all the technical skills and incredible creativity but brought some playfulness to change our clocks from technical pieces to creative artworks."