

Winston's Lost Watch

*How a watch led to one of young
Winston Churchill's finest hours*

BY JAY DESHPANDE

It was the kind of accident that happens before you know it. The cadet ambled along beside a stream on a spring afternoon, then bent down on the bank to pick up a stick – and in an instant, the pocketwatch in his breast pocket had slipped out and plunked into the water.

He immediately disrobed and dove for it, but he could only manage to stay in the frigid water for 10 minutes, and no luck: he couldn't find the watch. Although most of the stream was shallow, the watch had fallen in a six-foot-deep pool – the only one for miles around.

Most people would probably leave it there, lamenting a moment of bad luck and going home. Or they would try to tell themselves that it didn't matter, and that the loss was no big deal. But this young man was Winston Churchill, and the watch – a Dent (see sidebar), with a half-hunter case and the Churchill family coat of arms engraved and enameled on the back – was not something he could just give up.

At the time, in April 1894, Churchill was 19 and in his first year as an infantry

cadet at Sandhurst, the Royal Military College southwest of London. His uniform had no place to keep his pocket-watch protected, and he could not attach a chain for it. Although he'd had a leather case especially made for his watch, it wasn't enough to shield the Dent against the elements.

Winston was determined to get the watch back because of what it meant to him. The gold Dent had been a gift from his father, Lord Randolph, before Winston went to Sandhurst.

As a boy, Winston Churchill wouldn't have appeared to anyone as a leader and a hero in the making. He showed little of the grit, courage, or authority he would later be known for. Instead, he was generally described as an unimpressive student, without much drive or ambition. He was demanding of his parents, irresponsible, and clumsy. Getting accepted to the military college had taken him three tries. But the loss of the Dent watch brought out another side of him.

Winston hired 23 members of his infantry detachment at a cost of three pounds and had them dig a separate





"I WOULD NOT BELIEVE YOU COULD BE SUCH A YOUNG STUPID."

LORD RANDOLPH CHURCHILL

course for the stream, routing all the water away from the pool. He then got his hands on the Royal Military College's fire engine and pumped the pool completely dry. There, at the bottom, he finally found his watch. The insides were rusted and the watch would have to be entirely taken apart. He sent the watch to the shop of M.F. Dent in London, hoping to have it repaired quickly and be done with it. The story of Winston almost literally moving heaven and earth to get the watch back became the stuff of legend: his peers at Sandhurst would retell it, and even decades later, friends would write to him recalling the event.

But the victory was short-lived. On April 21, he received an unexpected letter from his father. "I would not believe you could be such a young stupid," Lord Randolph wrote. Randolph had already been angry when Winston damaged the watch the month before: a cadet running by had batted it out of his hand, and it had needed a new balance staff, minutes wheel, pinion, seconds hand and crystal. The watch also had to be cleaned and its case needed repairing. Now, hearing of even worse damage to the timepiece, Randolph was furious.

Winston was alarmed: how could his father have learned about the mishap? As it happened, while Winston's watch was in Dent's shop on Cockspur Street, Lord Randolph had taken his own watch into the same shop for repairs. Things still might have gone off without a hitch, but the watchmaker, Edward John Dent, hadn't realized that Winston wanted to

keep his misadventure under wraps, and told all to the elder Churchill. Consequently, Lord Randolph took the opportunity to lecture Winston on his actions:

It is clear you are not to be trusted with a valuable watch & when I get it from Mr Dent I shall not give it back to you. You had better buy one of those cheap watches for £2 as those are the only ones which if you smash are not very costly to replace. Jack [Winston's younger brother] has had the watch I gave him longer than you have had yours; the only expenses I have paid on his watch was 10/s for cleaning before he went back to Harrow. But in all qualities of steadiness taking care of his things & never doing stupid things Jack is vastly your superior.

Lord Randolph's words were painful and surprising, but it was not the first time that he had lashed out at his son. Winston had immense admiration for Lord Randolph, whose career as a prominent Tory leader had culminated when he briefly became chancellor of the exchequer and leader of the House of Commons in 1886. But Randolph's political rise was over nearly before it began, and by 1890 he was mostly forgotten.

Churchill's relationship with his father was characterized by distance and unpredictability. He cherished the rare moments of warmth from Lord Randolph, and would think back longingly to "the three or four long intimate conversations with him which are all I can boast." It was unknown to Winston and his family at the time of the watch incident, but the beleaguered Lord Randolph was approaching the end of his life. Although historians dispute the cause of his death — tertiary syphilis and a brain tumor have

Lord Randolph's career as an important Tory politician deteriorated while Winston was still a boy.

often been suggested – Randolph began to deteriorate mentally by 1894, losing his faculties and his ability to speak clearly. His contemporary Lord Rosebery once referred to Randolph's humiliating end, still trying to behave like himself and making embarrassing efforts to speak in Parliament, as "dying by inches in public." Most of this disintegration wasn't noticeable to the Churchill family until it was far advanced; and it was certainly not apparent to Winston, who had so few chances to be around his father during his cadetship.

Lord Randolph's mental duress had already led to several particularly cold-hearted criticisms of his son. A year before, when Winston had finally gained admission to Sandhurst, Randolph said little in congratulations, instead rebuking the boy for low marks that "demonstrated beyond refutation your slovenly happy-go-lucky harum scarum style of work for which you have always been distinguished at your different schools."

With all the advantages you had, with all the abilities which you foolishly think yourself to possess & which some of your relations claim for you, with all the efforts that have been made to make your life easy & agreeable & your work nei-

ther oppressive nor distasteful, this is the grand result that you come up among the 2nd rate & 3rd rate class who are only good for commissions in a cavalry regiment. ... if you cannot prevent yourself from leading the idle useless unprofitable life, ... you will become a mere social wastrel, one of the hundreds of the public school failures, and you will degenerate into a shabby unhappy & futile existence.

Now with the Dent watch, Winston had once again infuriated his father through an unhappy accident. Lord Randolph was astounded at his son's lack of responsibility. "The old Mr Dent was quite concerned at one of [the] best class of watches being treated in such a manner. ... I cannot understand anybody not taking the greatest care of a good watch," he wrote to his wife, Lady Randolph. Then, he added: "I wanted you to know this as he may tell a vy different story."

In this situation, as in others, Winston's mother served as a buffer between her husband and her son. Randolph knew that his wife would be easier on Winston. Lady Randolph, née Jennie Jerome, was an American heiress and a

famous beauty, known to have a long line of paramours. As Winston grew up, she became a more and more consistent advocate for him, and at times a political mentor, too. In France at the time of the incident, she comforted Winston about the loss of the Dent.

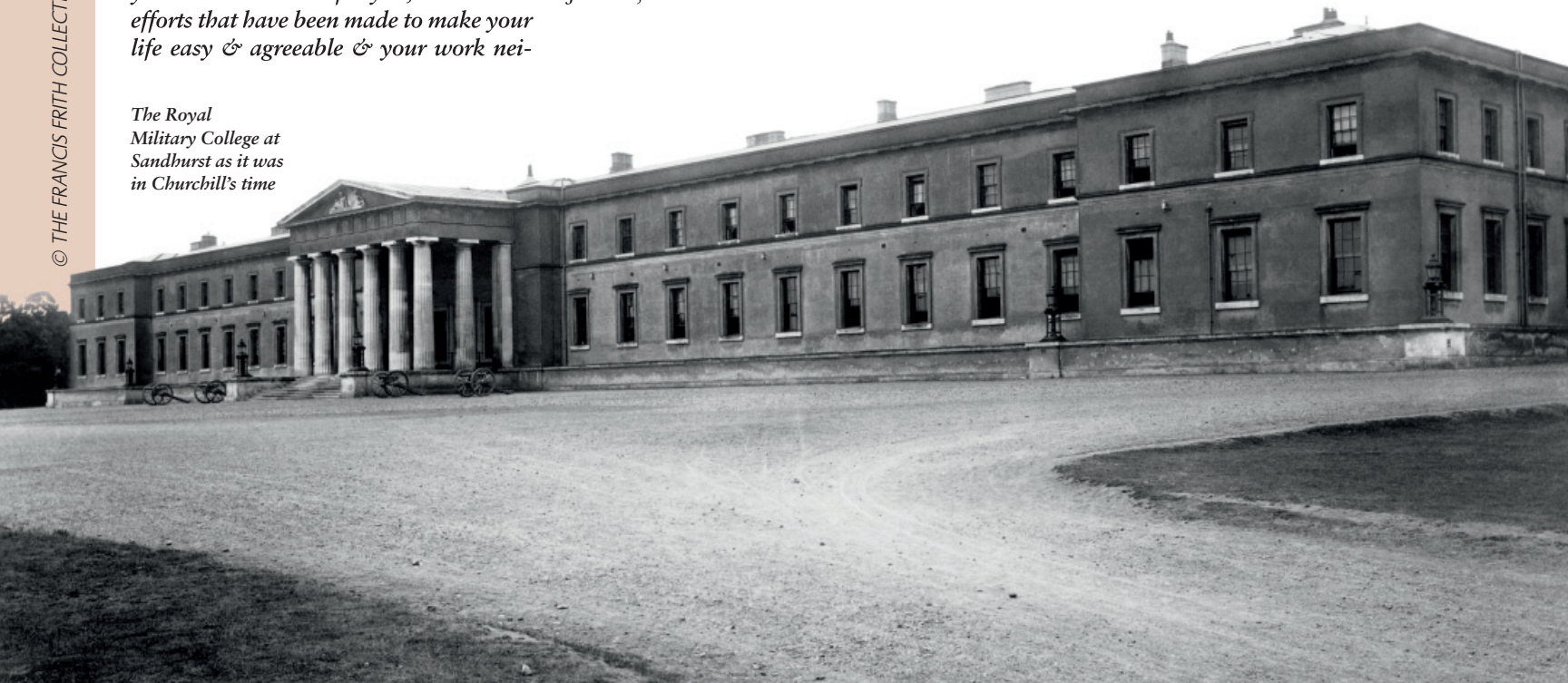
Dearest Winston,

I am so sorry you have got into trouble over your watch – Papa wrote to me all about it. ... However he wrote very kindly about you so you must not be too unhappy. ... Oh! Winny what a harum scarum fellow you are! You really must give up being so childish. I am sending you £2 with my love. I shall scold you well when we meet.

*Yr loving
Mother*

Winston had gone to great lengths and showed great responsibility in getting the watch back, but he also showed real maturity in dealing with the aftermath of the debacle. Responding to his father, he seems to have taken his mother's advice

*The Royal
Military College at
Sandhurst as it was
in Churchill's time*





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DENT WAS AMONG THE MOST PRESTIGIOUS NAMES IN ENGLISH WATCHMAKING.

A monument to Churchill now stands opposite the Palace of Westminster, facing the clock first installed by Dent in 1859.

The Making of Dent

When Lord Randolph Churchill gave his son Winston a gold Dent watch (see main story), he was being generous indeed: Dent was one of the most prestigious names in England's celebrated watch history.

The founder of the Dent watch company was the watchmaker Edward John Dent (1790-1853), who apprenticed and then served under a number of British watchmakers before becoming a partner in the firm of Arnold & Dent in London in 1830. ("Arnold" was John Roger Arnold, son of the famous John Arnold.) In 1840, Dent struck out on his own and became respected as a maker of chronometers and clocks used in voyages of discovery. Dent watches were used during Charles Darwin's 1831 journey on the H.M.S. Beagle, and David Livingstone purchased a Dent chronometer for his voyage to the interior of Africa in 1850. The Dent firm was responsible for many patents and innovations. Thomas Prest, who worked for Arnold & Dent, made one of the world's first keyless-winding mechanisms. Dent became a standard of fine watchmaking for royalty, and the company made timepieces for

monarchs in Britain, Russia, Japan, Persia, and elsewhere. In 1852, Dent received the order to construct the great clock commonly known as Big Ben for London's Palace of Westminster. (Strictly speaking, the name "Big Ben" refers to the clock's hour bell, not the clock itself.) The clock was installed in 1859.

Following E.J. Dent's death in 1853, his company was split between his two stepsons, and for the next 67 years there were two separate Dent companies—E. Dent & Co. and M.F. Dent. Lord Randolph purchased the gold watch for Winston from M.F. Dent, located at 33-34 Cockspur St., London. (The "Mr. Dent" referred to in Winston's and Lord Randolph's letters is another Edward John Dent, 1854-1899, the fourth member of the family to carry this name.)

The Dent company continued to operate through the 20th century, no longer making timepieces but rather repairing its old ones. In 2008, the Dent brand came back on the scene and began producing wristwatches. Its legacy as an historic watchmaker lives on today.



Churchill's mother, Jennie Jerome, was an American heiress and a famous beauty.

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to heart. His reply to Lord Randolph shows a young man developing formidable character, and making an effort to abandon his childish ways and take responsibility for himself in full:

I have been very unfortunate about the watch ... really I have had it for over a year without an accident and then come 2 in a fortnight. Yet I have been no less careful of it during that fortnight than during the preceding year.

Winston went on to describe the events in meticulous detail, admitting that he had been wrong and explaining where accidents had occurred outside of his control, as in the first case with the other boy. He acknowledged his own fault, saying, "this time I am more to blame," and he even explained all of his exertions with the pool and the infantry cadets in order to show his father how much trouble he had taken to find the watch. "I would rather you had not known about it," he writes at the end of the letter, "but since you know about it –

I feel I ought to tell you how it happened in order to show you that I really valued the watch and did my best to make sure of it."

I quite realise that I have failed to do so and I am very very sorry that it should have happened. But it is not the case with all my things. Everything else you have ever given me is in as good repair as when you gave it first.

Winston's measured, mature response must have comforted his father somewhat. In the end, he didn't have to buy a replacement: Lord Randolph resolved to purchase and send Winston a less valuable pocketwatch made by the Waterbury Watch Co. – "which is rather a come down," Winston admitted to his mother. Indeed, a Waterbury was a far cry from an English Dent watch. Waterbury was an American brand that mass-produced its watches; 75 years later its name would become "Timex."

Still, in a letter to his brother Jack, Winston made the best of the situation. "I have an excellent Waterbury watch which keeps far better time than the gold one," he wrote after the fact. Jack was six years younger than Winston, and had been eager to hear news about the scuffle that had everyone in the family up in arms. ("Why hav'ent I heard all these goings on before, how silly to have broken the watch!!!! Mama said Papa was furious ... Do write! and let me know how the watch happened.") Although Winston downplayed the incident to his brother, the whole affair must have plagued him for a long time. The Dent watch would later be given to Jack; Winston would never own it again. Jack wore it throughout his life and passed it on to his own son. (It was eventually stolen, and is no longer in the Churchill family.) The token of a father's respect had been taken away, and Winston could not get it back.

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A Dent watch similar in appearance to Churchill's. This 1896 Dent was recently sold at auction by Christie's.

But Winston took comfort in knowing that he had handled the situation well. Reflecting on it frankly in a follow-up letter to his mother, he writes:

I feel quite clear in my own mind that I am not to blame except for having brought so good a watch back here – where there is everything in the way of its safety.

The loss and recovery of Winston's watch has the feeling of a turning point in the young man's life. Sandhurst had a significant effect on Churchill's character, his ambition, and his ability to apply himself. By the end of his time there, Winston graduated 20th out of 130 cadets, a marked improvement from his arrival.

However, Lord Randolph didn't live to see any of his son's successes. Even during their tensions over the watch, Randolph's mind was going; two weeks after the angry letter, his doctor advised him to give up public life altogether. He would die in January of 1895, just as Winston was graduating from Sandhurst.

Winston was dedicated to preserving and honoring his father's legacy; one of the first of his many books was a biography of Lord Randolph, aimed at repairing the reputation of the elder Churchill.

In the last years of Lord Randolph's life, Winston had hoped for some rapprochement. "Had he lived another four or five years, he could not have done without me. But there were no four or five years! Just as friendly relations were ripening into an Entente, and an alliance or at least a military agreement seemed to my mind not beyond the bounds of reasonable endeavor, he vanished for ever."

In the decades that followed, Churchill owned several other watches, the most famous of which is a gold Breguet no. 765 pocketwatch – a chronograph with a minute repeater and a fly-back seconds hand, purchased by his uncle the Duke of Marlborough. He owned at least one other Dent: company records show that in 1911 he bought a gold Dent pocketwatch, again with a hunter case. Churchill died on Jan. 24, 1965 – 70 years to the day after his father's death. ○



Churchill in 1910, when he was Home Secretary

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The Moser Perpetual 1

Remaking Moser

By streamlining production and focusing on profitability, Moser's new owners hope to give the brand a second chance.

BY JAY DESHPANDE

In October 2012, it looked like curtains for H. Moser & Cie. Launched with much fanfare in 2005, the brand quickly became a darling of watch collectors thanks to its original and innovative watches. Based in the Swiss town of Neuhausen, next to Schaffhausen and not far from the border with Germany, the brand is named for the 19th-century watch entrepreneur and industrialist Heinrich Moser (see sidebar). It had been revived by a group of investors that included Jürgen Lange, an engineer who had developed movements for the IWC brand, based in Schaffhausen, and Roger Nicholas Balsiger, the brand's honorary chairman, who is the great-grandson of Heinrich Moser.

But Moser soon ran into trouble. Its watches turned out to be inordinately expensive to produce. Their movements were extremely complex and difficult to regulate. Some components required hours of manual labor and were manufactured to unnecessarily strict tolerances. The watches excited collectors and the brand soon had a long list of orders to fulfill, but deliveries lagged. Some customers found themselves waiting a year or more for their Mosers. Eventually, demand disappeared and Moser's reputation soured. The problems continued: certain watches were recalled; prices on all of them were too low to make them profitable. The excitement that met its first watches in the mid-2000s had all but dried up. So, too, had its finances. By 2012, the brand needed new investors and a new plan or it would have to shutter its factory.

To the rescue came Swiss watch veteran Georges-Henri Meylan, the long-time CEO of Audemars Piguet. He had retired from AP in 2008, but retirement wasn't his cup of tea, and he created a family-run holding company, MELB Holding – an acronym for “Meylan Edouard Léonore Bertrand,” the names of his three children. Meylan brought together experts and associates from his career in the watch world, including Bill Muirhead, former financial director of Breguet, who now serves as MELB's CEO. In October 2012, MELB Holding purchased Moser, along with its sister company, the balance-spring maker Precision Engineering. Moser got a new lease on life.

MELB's goal is to acquire financially troubled watch brands and revive them. Earlier in 2012 it made its first purchase, Hautlence, a small,

high-end brand based in La Chaux-de-Fonds. That year, Moser's investors asked Meylan to audit their company and see how it could be turned around. Seeing potential in the brand, Meylan chose to acquire it.

In April 2013, MELB appointed Edouard Meylan, Georges-Henri's son, as CEO. The younger Meylan was trained as an

engineer and is a co-founder of Celsius X VIII, which manufactures cellular phones with built-in mechanical watch movements. (His brother, Bertrand Meylan, runs MELB Asia, the group's distribution company for Greater China.)

The challenges MELB faces with Moser are imposing: how can the company keep producing the watches that impressed collectors, but better, and without losing money? In December, WatchTime visited Moser's headquarters in Neuhausen to learn about the Meylans' plans.

THOSE PLANS STARTED

WITH lowering Moser's crippling production costs. Edouard Meylan and his team examined the collection movement by movement, looking for ways to improve the manufacturing process. They widened tolerances for some components, where doing so would not affect the movement's performance, and made alterations to the design of others so that they could be more easily machined and require less hand tooling. For Meylan,

increasing efficiency was often about homing in on small details, like the number of different screws used in a particular movement. “For our simplest movement today we use about 14 different types of screws,” he says, “but at Baselworld we're launching a new version of it with just two different types.” The time a watchmaker saves when he has just two boxes of screws



Edouard Meylan, CEO of H. Moser & Cie.



Moser's headquarters are in Neuhausen, just south of Schaffhausen.

to choose from will make a real difference as the company increases its production, Meylan says. Moser currently produces around 1,000 watches a year, and intends to reach 3,000 by 2017.

Another way that Moser plans to cut costs is by scaling back some of its most ambitious innovations. For several years the brand had employed its patented Straumann double hairsprings. (They're named after Reinhard Straumann, inventor of the Nivarox alloy. Thomas Straumann, his grandson, is a

minority investor in Moser.) In a Straumann double hairspring, the escapement stacks two identical springs wound in opposite directions so that their inconsistencies counteract one another, providing an internal regulation not unlike that of a tourbillon. Moser introduced the double hairspring in 2009 in a model called the Henry, and later produced double-hairspring versions of several other watches. But constructing and regulating the springs is enormously expensive; they cost about as much to make as a tourbillon, Meylan says, and need to be priced

accordingly. Moser has discontinued the Henry model and will use the double hairspring only for special pieces.

Similarly, the brand is cutting back on its use of the interchangeable escapement, which was much ballyhooed when Moser unveiled it in 2005. A separate plate for the escapement is fixed to the mainplate with screws and can be easily removed and replaced. The interchangeable escapement was intended to make after-sales service easier, but it slowed down production and raised costs (a movement with one of these escapements costs 10 times as much to make as a standard ETA caliber). The brand has now scaled back its use to its higher-end watches.

The process of analyzing and streamlining production techniques is still going on, Meylan says. “Eventually, we'll get the movements that allow us to generate the proper margins we need to survive.”

Georges-Henri Meylan is the chairman of MELB Holding.





Precision Engineering supplies hairsprings to H. Moser & Cie., its sister company.

At the same time, Meylan has examined the other side of the profitability equation: prices. They simply weren't high enough, given the brand's very limited production and high costs. He has raised them 15 to 20 percent. They now range from \$18,300 to \$78,000, with special editions at about \$120,000. With higher prices, lower manufacturing costs, and increased production, Moser intends to break even by 2016.

Moser has also brought more of its production in house. Until last year, a portion of its manufacturing was done in a factory in Schramberg, Germany. Operations performed there have now been transferred to the Neuhausen facility. Meylan says that MELB may one day acquire other factories to produce gears and other components not now made in house.

The Neuhausen facility also houses Precision Engineering. Precision, whose managing director reports to Edouard Meylan, makes about 50,000 assortments a year, supplying not just Moser and Hautlence, but a variety of other brands, from large-scale companies wanting an alternative to the Swatch Group's Nivarox to small independents like Kari Voutilainen. Thanks to the Meylans' many watch-industry contacts, MELB has helped Precision expand its network of customers.

MOSER STARTED TO OVERHAUL the production process by focusing on its best known models. These include the Perpetual 1, the watch that put Moser on the watch connoisseur's map when it was unveiled in 2005 and is the brand's most popular model. Meylan says that the company found 70 ways to improve the movement-manufacturing process. A Perpetual 1 used to take a watchmaker 90 hours to assemble. It now takes just 25 to 35 hours.



On the back of the Perpetual 1 you can see the "leap year star."

Designed in cooperation with the independent watchmaker Andreas Strehler, the Perpetual 1 generated buzz among collectors because of its technical innovations, which resulted in an extremely simple, easy-to-read-and-set calendar display. The watch has a big date at 3 o'clock and a power-reserve display at 9. Its most notable dial feature is a very short arrow-shaped hand mounted at the center. This hand tells the month, by pointing to the equivalent hour index (5 o'clock for May, 9 o'clock

for September, etc.). The brand claims that this is the first watch to employ this kind of month display.

The watch can be set by turning the crown either forward or back without damaging the movement. The leap year setting is controlled by a recessed button at 9 o'clock, and you can tell where it is in the four-year cycle via the "leap year star" visible through the caseback. Another notable feature is the so-called "flash" calendar, which Moser also employs on its Monard Big

Moser the Man

Although he has been all but forgotten today, Heinrich Moser was a major figure in the Swiss watch industry and in the history of Schaffhausen. He was born there in 1805. He came from a line of watchmakers: both his father and his grandfather served as official watchmakers for the town. Moser apprenticed himself to his father to learn watchmaking as a teenager, then furthered his training in Le Locle.

In 1827, he moved to St. Petersburg to make his name as a watchmaker. After he fixed a mechanism belonging to Tsar Nicholas I, Moser's reputation developed quickly among the Russian aristocracy. He founded H. Moser & Cie., setting up a factory in Le Locle and offices in St. Petersburg and Moscow. The company became so renowned in Russia that watches were referred to there as

Heinrich Moser



Schloss Charlottenfels

"Mosers," according to Edouard Meylan, Moser CEO. Moser returned to Switzerland in 1848, at which point his company had become quite productive: it produced some 600,000 watches in its first 20 years.

Although Moser was denied the position of city watchmaker after his father's death, he went on to leave his mark on Schaffhausen by industrializing the town. Moser invested his considerable wealth to construct a dam over the Rheinfall (the largest waterfall in Europe), supplying power to many of the factories and mills in Schaffhausen. He also bought up property along the Rhine and rented it out, inducing a great influx of labor and capital. It was Moser who rented space to the young American engineer Florentine Ariosto Jones, who came to Schaffhausen in 1868 to found IWC.

Across the river from his factories and the falls, Moser erected a stately villa named after his first wife, Charlotte Mayu. Schloss Charlottenfels still stands

Roger Nicholas Balsiger



as a monument to the importance of the Mosers in Schaffhausen. It now houses a family museum, managed by Roger Nicholas Balsiger, the honorary chairman of H. Moser & Cie.

In 1918, after the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks expropriated the St. Petersburg-based watch company; the Le Locle operations would continue independently for some time. H. Moser & Cie. went through a variety of incarnations in the 20th century. It was dormant for at least a decade before its relaunch in 2005.

Date watch. Beneath the dial are two layered calendar disks. The lower one shows numbers 16 to 31; the top one shows 1 to 15, and also has a window through which you can see a number from the bottom disk. By layering these disks and controlling how the display shifts between the higher and lower disks, the watch is able to switch immediately at the stroke of midnight between dates, and without ever having to display 29, 30, or 31 in a month that doesn't have those dates. The watch has a seven- to 10-day power reserve thanks to a double-barreled mainspring. The Perpetual 1 comes in a case of white or rose gold or platinum; all are 40.8 mm in diameter and 11.05 mm thick. It costs \$60,000 in gold and \$78,000 in platinum.

Last year, Meylan also focused on making improvements to the Nomad Dual Time (\$36,500), a two-time-zone automatic. It was Moser's only entirely new model at Baselworld in 2013: Meylan's team chose to redesign the automatic movement in the now-defunct Meridian watch and use it in the Nomad. Some changes are visible on the dial: a 12/24-hour indicator that was easily confused with a big date has now been replaced by an



The Perpetual 1 and the Monard Big Date both use a “flash” calendar comprised of two layered disks.

a.m./p.m. indicator for the home time zone, showing white before noon and black from noon to midnight. The Nomad employs a click system for winding, similar to a Pellaton winding system, used by IWC, or Seiko's “magic lever.” Moser's engineers did a dynamic simulation of the spring and adjusted its design. Meylan says this was the most difficult piece of the movement to master. Moser produces six movements, used in six models. They're led by the HMC 341, contained in the Perpetual 1, and the HMC 321, used in the Mayu Small Seconds. The others are the HMC 342, in the Monard Big Date; the 343, in the Monard Center Seconds; the 346, in the Nomad; and the 348, used in the Perpetual Moon. All have a frequency of 18,000 vph and all but the 346 are manual-wind movements.

Effective at Baselworld this year, Moser is grouping all six models into a single collection called Endeavor and renaming them. The Perpetual 1 will become the Endeavor Perpetual, the Nomad Dual Time will be the Endeavor Dual Time, etc.



Georges-Henri Meylan with Guillaume Tetu, co-founder and CEO of Hautlence

Moser will also introduce its second collection, called Venturer, which will have a retro-style case. (No further details were available at press time.)

Meylan says all new models will remain true to Moser's defining characteristics: a long power reserve (the shortest is three days and most models have seven days of power), double côtes de Genève decorations and the Moser hallmark on the movement, an arched balance bridge (Moser calls it a “moustache”), screwed gold mounts, a slow-beat balance, and, on the models with dark dials, a so-called “fumé” effect, with a slight gradation from lighter to denser color saturation (“fumé” is French for “smoked”).

IN THE MEANTIME, MELB's other watch brand, Hautlence, has also undergone some changes. The brand was founded in 2004 by Renaud de Retz and Guillaume Tetu, the brand's CEO.



The Hautlence HLRQ 01



Moser's Nomad Dual Time has an a.m./p.m. indicator just below 12 o'clock.

The company has designed all its own watches and calibers, the components for which are made chiefly by outside contractors. Like Moser, Hautlence had fallen on hard times. It broke even in 2008, but was then hobbled by the financial crisis. In 2013 Hautlence produced 220 pieces, and it has budgeted an increase in production to 450 for 2014. The brand expects to be profitable by next year.

Hautlence has three collections: Origine, Avant-Garde, and Concepts d'Exception. All feature unconventional dials: most of its watches have jumping hours and retrograde minutes displays. One recent example is the HLRQ 01. Powered by the Hautlence-designed HLQ caliber, the manual-winding watch has a jumping hour on the left and a retrograde minutes dial on the right, as well as a date window at 6 o'clock. Through the dial's overlapping displays you can see part of the movement. Also characteristic of Hautlence, the case combines different materials, with DLC-coated titanium and a rose-gold bezel. Hautlence's watches are priced higher than Moser's: the HLRQ 01 costs \$46,000, and the collections as a whole range from \$21,400 to about \$250,000.

Collaboration between Moser and Hautlence is part of MELB's plan for growth, and will allow the brands to achieve economies of scale. Plans are in the works for a Moser-produced automatic caliber that could be modified and used in new Hautlence watches.

Whether or when MELB will add more brands remains to be seen. The company has said publicly that it will. Standing in the Moser conference room, in front of a table covered with re-engineered, and, he hopes, now-profitable Moser watches, Meylan points out that it might be a while: the company has its hands full now. “It's a lot of work at the moment,” he says with a laugh.

Jay Deshpande
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