

europa star

SPECIAL

THE WORLD'S MOST INFLUENTIAL WATCH MAGAZINE SPECIAL



HUGO BUCHSER (1896-1961), AND THE ORIGINS OF EUROPA STAR

AN EDITORIAL ADVENTURE



Men who guide the destinies of the world wear Rolex watches

You know their names as you know your own. You know their faces from a thousand newspaper photographs, their life stories from a hundred magazine articles. You have seen them and heard their voices on newsreels and on your television screen. Their actions and decisions influence the pattern of our lives.

We cannot mention their names, or show pictures of them. It would not be fitting to do so, for they include royalty, the heads of states, great service commanders. But we invite you to look carefully at the next pictures that you see of them, at their wrists as well as their faces and clothes. You will notice that in almost every case they wear a wrist-watch. That watch will most likely have been made by Rolex of Geneva. We are proud of the service given by Rolex watches to so many eminent men. It is scarcely necessary to point out that the performance of these watches is, in the highest degree, accurate and dependable.

The Rolex Oyster Perpetual Datejust, the most remarkable achievement in watch-making. Every Datejust is awarded an Official Timing Certificate by a Swiss Institute for Official Timekeeping Tests with the mention "especially good results". This accuracy is protected by the famous Oyster case, guaranteed 100% waterproof to a depth of 165 feet under water. The watch is selfwound by the Perpetual rotor mechanism and the date is shown on the dial, changing instantaneously every midnight, and magnified by the Cyclops lens for easy reading.



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RED SEAL
CHRONOMETER

The Rolex Oyster Perpetual — culmination of three Rolex triumphs. In 1910 Rolex gained their first Official Timing Certificate for a wrist-chronometer. In 1926, Rolex invented the Oyster watch-case, the first truly waterproof case in the world and still the finest. In 1931 Rolex invented the first rotor self-winding mechanism. A new refinement of this Perpetual rotor powers the Oyster Perpetual silently and automatically.


ROLEX

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history of
Time measurement*



A ROLEX
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FOREWORD

A company finds its origins in the innovative ideas of its founder, even if they are at first considered illusory. It's about going to places where nobody has had the time, the courage or simply the spirit to invest. It's about facing up to the feeble and jealous adversity of one's peers. But it's also about building up a team, choosing the right people and appreciating their work.

Having followed international developments in the watchmaking, jewellery and machine industries for over 80 years, *Europa Star* is no exception to this rule. Hugo Buchser, the founder of the group, developed the conviction, through his travels to the four corners of the Earth, that these industries needed to be opened up to the world's markets by distributing information about them. From the 1930s his buyers' and machine guides, and later his magazines published from South America to the Far East, opened up new global trade routes.

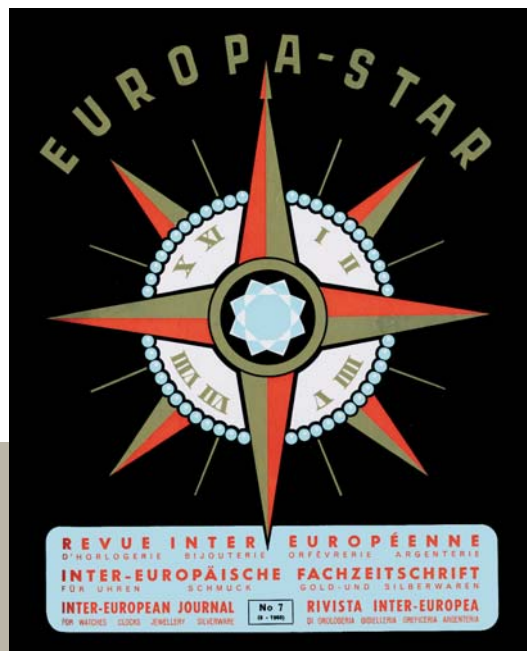
A company's longevity is the best proof of the success of its founder's original ideas. Under the stewardship of the same family since 1927, *Europa Star* remains loyal to the spirit of Hugo Buchser, some fifty years after his death.

This article traces the origins of the *Europa Star* publications by writing the story of its founder. Knowing his past allows us to look to the future with confidence. Firmly convinced of the quality of the written word on paper, *Europa Star* also embraces modern technology, with its websites and new iPad applications, to pursue an idea that has already proved itself. That idea is to show the value of the expertise that places time and beauty at the centre of our world.

Serge Maillard



Cover of the Inter-European Journal for Watches, Clocks, Jewellery and Silverware, *Europa Star*, 1959



On the cover: Hugo Buchser, Bombay, 1920

Inside front cover: Rolex, *Europa Star* no.1, 1959

Inside back cover: Roamer, *As Sā'ātwal-Djawāher (Orafrica)* no. 12, 1952

Back cover: Breitling, *Oro y Hora* no. 14/1951



A VOYAGE TO THE INDIES

At the start of the twentieth century, the inn at Wirthen in Solothurn was a meeting place for all the town's students and bourgeoisie, as well as watchmaking employees from the region. This is where Hugo Buchser's career took off, in 1919. The young man, who was the inn-keeper's son, had a feel for business. If not the first of his initiatives in watchmaking, by far the most original was the story of the "reversed dials".

Sitting at a table one evening in the inn, Hugo Buchser overheard a conversation between two depressed-looking watchmakers on the next table. One of them explained the reason for their mood to the young man: "Can you believe that our workers have managed to assemble an entire batch of watches with gear trains that move backwards...?". But they quickly perked up when their young confidant offered to buy this "spoiled" batch of one thousand pieces. The deal was done quickly. For a good price, of course.

A few months later the young man, in

his twenties, boarded a steamer in Genoa that was heading for the Indies. "At the dawn of a new decade," Hugo Buchser must have thought from the deck of the vessel on the Mediterranean. In his cabin he set down a large case containing a thousand watches whose hands turned the wrong way. This was his first trip to such faraway lands and the young man was drawn to point out the stops along the way on the map: Pompei, Heraklion, Alexandria and Aden, all the way to his destination, Bombay, the gateway to the Indies. He chanted the names as a priest would say his rosary.

Learning to jump from a moving train

He had already travelled all over the Old Continent. He had crossed western Europe: Germany, Belgium, Switzerland and France. On his own account because he wasn't one to take orders, preferring instead to put his own numerous ideas into practice. He had been educated in the humanist and Catholic tradition of the *Collège Saint-Michel* in Fribourg,

which had given him the desire to "see everything, know everything".

Basing his first business on his region of origin, Hugo Buchser established his own watchmaking business, the "Transmarine Uhrenfabrik" at the age of 18. The name was an early betrayal of his taste for exoticism, the ocean and distant horizons. At the end of the first world war, he expanded his business to neighbouring countries.

The young entrepreneur had lost count of the number of trains he had taken to Brussels, his second headquarters. He had equally lost count of the many drawn-out procedures he had to follow each time in order to get a pass at a time when borders were very difficult to cross, given the economic protectionism, heightened nationalism and war-mongering that pervaded Europe at the time.

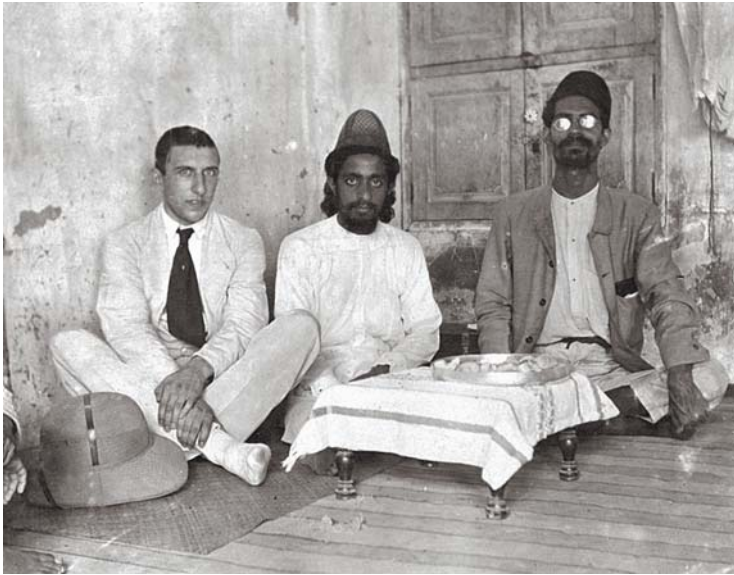
So to make ends meet, the young man also took along some extra watches and jewellery. Once the adventurer even had to pull the alarm cord and jump from the train when the customs officials were getting dangerously close to his compartment...

The roller-coaster ride

The Buchser clan, originally from Herzogenbuchsee in the canton of Berne, settled in Solothurn during the Reformation so that they could keep their Catholic faith. One of the scant recollections that Hugo had of his father, the inn-keeper, was that he had a severe look and an imposing stature, with a natural authority that he himself seemed to have inherited.



The stand of Transmarine, established by the young Hugo Buchser, at the Vienna exhibition, 1923



With Zoroastrian preachers: the Swiss fakir in good company, Bombay, 1920



Travelling across India, 1920

The business in Wirthen was flourishing – it was the first establishment in the town to offer bathrooms. It even made the owner a millionaire in gold. But his untimely death at the age of 40, in his restaurant, ruined the family. His over-generous wife gave away the family fortune to unscrupulous people who came to claim for non-existent debts.

Hugo, the youngest, therefore had a meagre upbringing with his six siblings. One of his two brothers joined the orders and, after a stay in Einsiedeln, joined a monastery in the depths of the Argentinean pampas. He took the name "Father Polycarpe".

The magic watches of the Swiss fakir

As he watched the European coastline disappear from the deck of the vessel carrying him to the Indies, Hugo Buchser undoubtedly recalled the wild life he had lived with his other brother, Franz, in Brussels. The younger generally pretended to be the fiancé of the Duchess of Luxembourg, or, with his elder, pretended to be an officer in the Belgian capital's vice squad. Both of them had a taste for mystification. When he left for the Indies, Hugo left his brother to continue the Transmarine adventure in Brussels.

The voyage east took several weeks. When he arrived in Bombay, the young adventurer's heart was beating fast, filled with promise for his "innovative" watches on the sub-continent that was still under British domination.

The future proved him right: the watches from Solothurn with the backwards springs were a hit. From sailors to maharajas, everyone wanted this "distinguished novelty", this "fashionable object", as the Swiss entrepreneur astutely presented them. Too bad if these watches could not fulfil their role as timekeepers because of the manufacturing defect. After all, few in India

Damas, *La Revista Relojera* no. 39, 1945



Longines, *La Revista Relojera* no. 37, 1945



Piaget, *The Eastern Jeweller & Watchmaker*, 1950





At the foot of the pyramids and the Sphinx, Egypt, 1920

had even learned to tell the time back then. The ornamental value of the products was much greater than their original function.

The young Hugo had more than one item in his trunk. In addition to the “inversed” watches, he also brought some clocks with fluorescent radium to the Indies. They worked on a very simple principle: expose them to sunlight and they light up. But this argument did not appear effective enough for the entrepreneur. When he visited the maharajas to present his product, he stressed that this mechanism was triggered “by magic”. When he was presenting the clocks, he discretely exposed them to sunlight. He would then say his magic words before showing the clocks to his amazed audience, who were hooked.

In Ghandi's tent

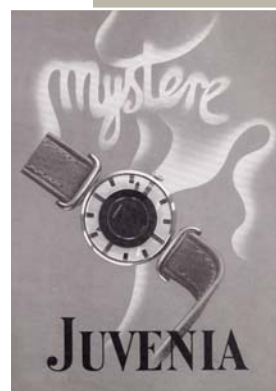
From Agra to Lahore, from Varanasi to the Hindu Kush, the reversed mechanisms and luminescent clocks allowed the young Hugo Buchser to travel the

length and breadth of India for an entire year. His initial plan was to continue his expedition as far as the Netherlands Antilles, but the charms of the sub-continent – and the fact that he had easily sold his products – led him to continue his tour of the country. Legend has it that his extended stay allowed him to share the tent of an Indian lawyer who also appreciated his liberty, whose name was Ghandi. The two subsequently kept up a correspondence which has unfortunately long since disappeared. In 1921 Hugo Buchser headed back to Europe. The year in India had sharpened his spirit of independence and his taste for adventure. He already saw himself embarking on other journeys, from Europe to South America. The 1920s certainly deserved their appellation “The Roaring Twenties”. They saw the first steps towards the realisation of his ideas to link together watchmakers across the world and would feed the tales – sometimes imaginary, sometimes real – of this inspired self-made man.

Fortis, Oro y Hora no. 15, 1951

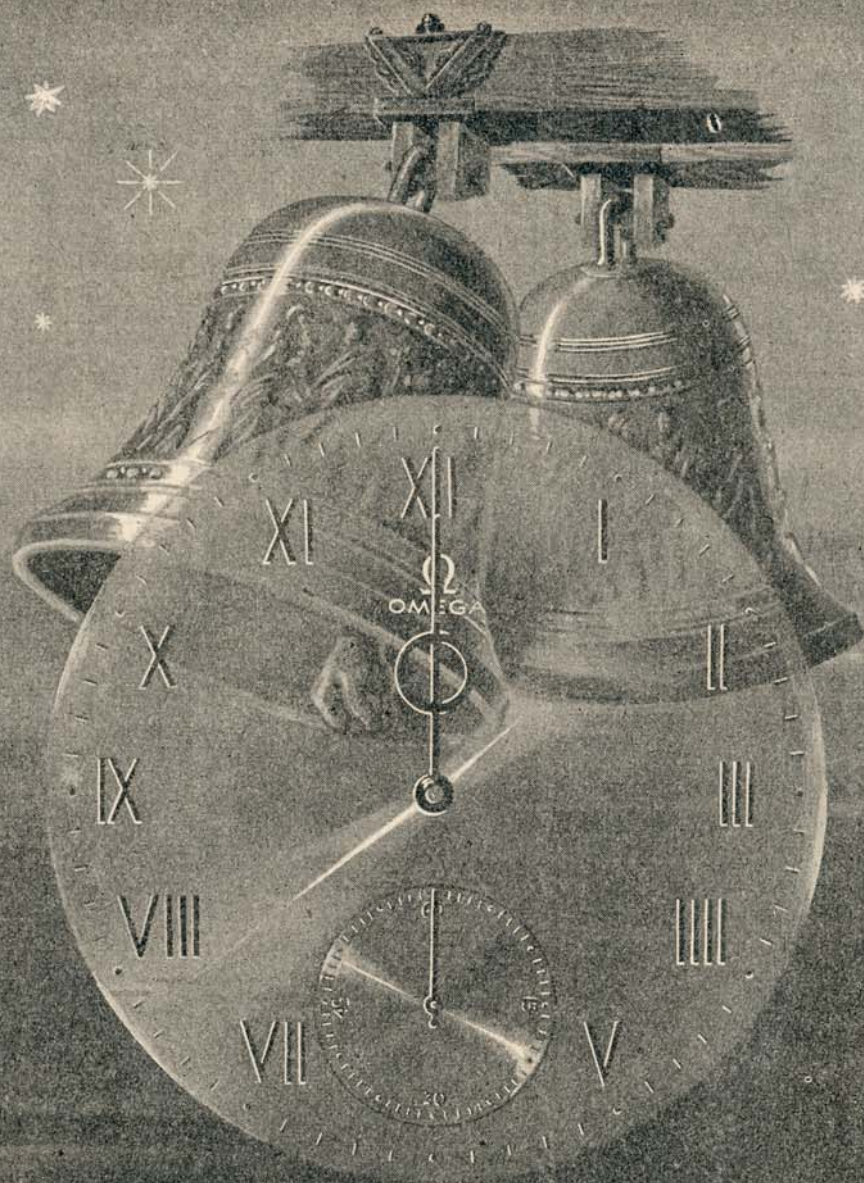


Movado and Juvenia, The Eastern Jeweller & Watchmaker no. 1, 1951



Ebauches S.A., La Revista Relojera no. 42, 1945





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RELOJ

OMEGA
FELIZ AÑO NUEVO!



THE DEBUT IN PUBLISHING

At the start of the 1920s, after his first steps in the production and export of watches, Hugo Buchser returned to his native Solothurn. In 1926, he married Mary Stüdeli there – an heiress of the major watchmaker Roamer (Meyer-Stüdeli), which was producing over a million watches per year at the time. The two met in the mixed choir of St. Ursen cathedral, one of the most beautiful baroque churches in Switzerland. Like Hugo Buchser, the young woman, with her big green eyes, dark hair and matte skin, did not fit with the Swiss German stereotypes, especially as Solothurn, as the city of diplomatic residences, was also a melting-pot of different races.



The wedding of Hugo Buchser and Mary Stüdeli, St. Ursen cathedral, Solothurn, 1926

Driven by his love of the open seas and with a solid artistic flair, Hugo Buchser took to business by default, to earn himself some money. But although he had a knack for it, his true dream was to write, to live a Bohemian lifestyle and



The first guides developed by Hugo Buchser in the early 1930s: the *Buyer's Guide*, the *Guide Rapid* and the *Machines Guide*.

dedicate himself fully to his art, like his close relative Frank Buchser, the painter and adventurer from Solothurn.

A seductive hidalgo with a love of Spain, Hugo Buchser lived for months at a time with the Andalusians, whose pride he admired and whose free and independent lifestyle without ties he loved. His love of art and his success in business were linked by common traits: an extraordinary character, a strong work ethic and persuasiveness for unconventional ideas, not forgetting a frankness that won him solid friendships.

First steps in publishing

It was in 1929, shortly before the Great Depression, that the entrepreneur, who was newly installed in his new adoptive city of Geneva, established the *Guide des Acheteurs* ("Buyer's Guide") for watchmaking and jewellery. Meeting a growing demand, this guide was the first to list all the useful addresses in the watchmaking business in Switzerland. The bi-monthly account of the "possibilities and situation of export markets" accompanied the guide.

With these publications, Hugo Buchser laid the foundations for what was to become the magazine *Europa Star* as we

know it today. Since the machine industry was the natural partner of watchmaking, he also launched the *Guide des Machines* and the *Bulletin d'informations techniques* ("Technical information bulletin") in 1932, both of which were soon distributed worldwide.

Hugo Buchser was not only interested in watchmaking, however. As a tireless traveller, he also produced the *Guide Rapid* from 1932. A kind of Michelin Guide for the times, this practical directory of addresses was aimed at tourists visiting the cities of Basle, Zurich or Geneva looking for an attractive shop or a convivial restaurant. Based on the personal experience of its creator, who had a fine palate and a critical mind, it was a considerable success.

An intransigent patriarch

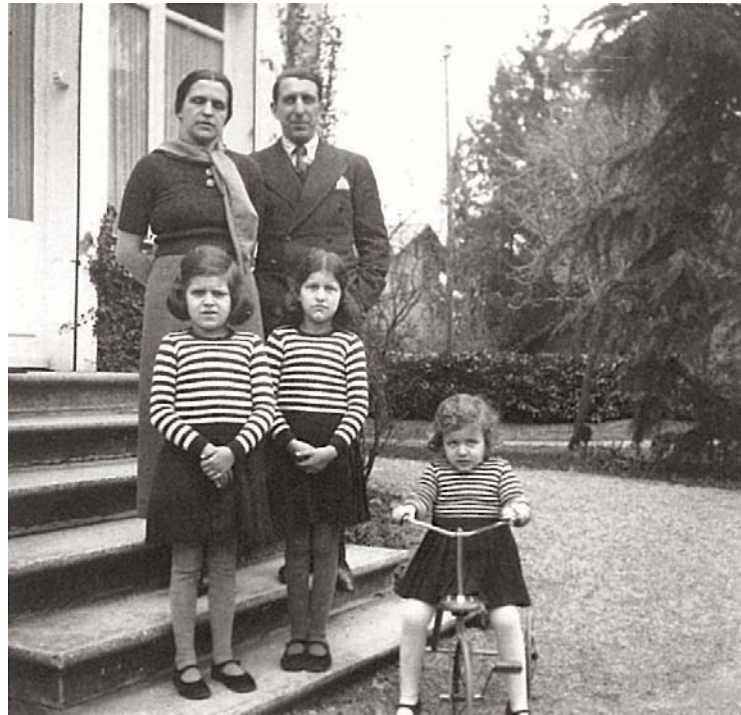
This was also the period of fatherhood for Hugo Buchser. He had three daughters, Doris, Suzi and Lisbeth with his wife, who returned to Solothurn for each birth. The three heiresses had a strict upbringing under their father's watchful eye. Although often absent for long periods of time abroad, their father ensured that discipline and order prevailed during his short stays in Geneva.

Milus, *Eastern Jeweller* no. 21, 1954Certina, *Estrella del Sur* no. 13, 1952Herodia, *Oro y Hora* no. 28, 1953Nivarox, *Europa Star* no. 1, 1959

The family had the first private swimming pool in Geneva, dug out in part by the tiny hands of the three daughters. The little girls also had to pick the apples from some 150 trees in the garden. The patriarch wanted to teach the value of individual effort, the key to independence when, like him, you started out with nothing.

The complement to this iron discipline was the possibility to see the world through trips – to Spain, Italy or France – that were at the time only accessible to the privileged classes. Whenever they arrived, they had to take in everything: museums, churches, with even the smallest chapel being visited from top to bottom. And in the evening the girls had to provide a detailed account of their day to their father. They had to see, listen and instruct. And this was at any time and without excuse.

Hugo Buchser used the same explosive mixture of possessive and well-meaning severity towards his employees, who also had to work in their boss's garden at the weekend. At a time when working for a company was considered a contract for life and a manager genuinely embodied his company, employees were expected to commit their body



In the early 1930s, the Buchsers with their three daughters: Suzi, Doris and Lisbeth, in Chêne-Bourg.

and soul to the material well-being of their employer...

The war years had their effect on the business of watch guides and magazines. In these years of rationing, the entrepreneur had no choice but to mothball his trusty Oldsmobile, with which he had crossed the Old Continent, to avoid giving it to the army. In 1941, he was trapped in the Ritz hotel in

Barcelona with the Swiss community, while in Geneva, the Buchser family was taking in foreign children who were victims of the vagaries of war.

Survival, both national and individual, was the priority at the time. But the post-war years made way for an unprecedented economic upswing, both for Switzerland and for the company established by Hugo Buchser.

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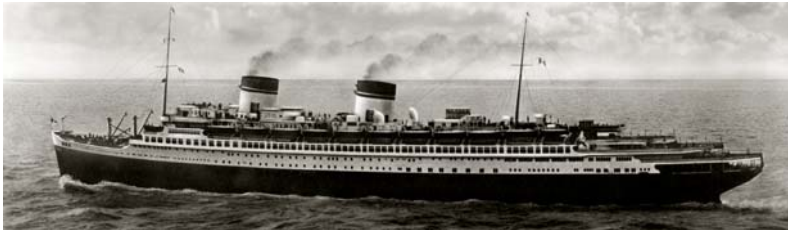
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TOWARDS A GLOBAL MAGAZINE



The transatlantic steamer Rex, heading for Brazil, 1948

Following the second world war, which had put a brake on the development of the watch guides by restricting the travels of their founder, Hugo Buchser regained his frenetic interest in business trips. From 1946, he visited Germany, reduced to the industrial equivalent of the stone age at “zero hour”. En route, he visited several former concentration camps, opened to the public by the Allies to show the horrors of the Nazi regime and to remind them of the mantra “never again”.

The entrepreneur also realised that promising markets were opening up

outside Europe thanks to a new globalisation in trade. Latin America, the Arab world and the Far East were bristling with the hopes of a “third way” between communism and capitalism.

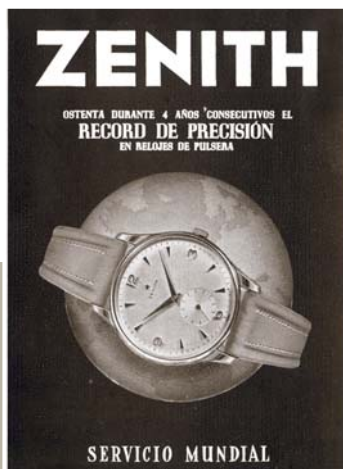
The call of South America

In 1948, Hugo Buchser left with his daughter Doris on a transatlantic vessel to Brazil for a Latin American tour. This continent was not totally new to him, since he had published the watchmaking magazine *La Revista Relojera* in Buenos Aires since 1942. A new middle class was emerging in Latin America and this was an enticing prospect for the

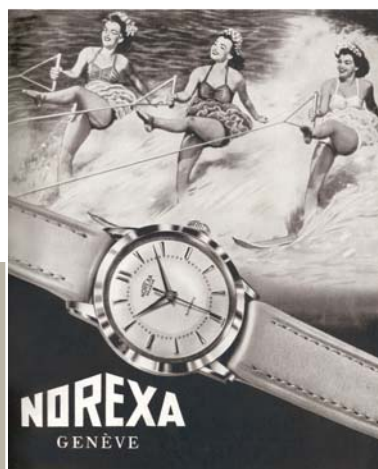
watch and jewellery market. Wherever he went, the Swiss entrepreneur left an editorial trace. In Brazil he set up the specialist magazine *Elegancia e Precisão* and in Argentina *l'Estrella del Sur*, based on a simple business model: these magazines were designed in Geneva before being distributed across the Atlantic. A trusted representative on the ground approached watchmaking suppliers to encourage them to invest in the advertising supplements of the publications. The businessman also remained a man of letters. He had an insatiable thirst for curiosities and encounters and claimed to speak “marineiro”, a mixture of Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, the “language of sailors”. On the return voyage from Latin America, he stopped in Lisbon, where he set up the magazine *Belora*, and in Spain, where the publication *Oro y Hora* was born in 1949. An inspired writer, Hugo Buchser kept detailed journals from all his trips. His “impressions of Latin America” were published by the *Tribune de Genève* newspaper. They started with the promising words: “Brazil is a great enigma”.

His clear analysis of the economic situation led to a conclusion that is as valid now as it was back then: “The South American states have been developing

Zenith, *Oro y Hora* no. 32, 1954



Norexa, *Oro y Hora* no. 34, 1954



with extraordinary dynamism over the past decade and, while many European countries are in a slow decline, nations such as Brazil are looking forward with vigour and belief to a future full of promise."

In the East and the West

In 1950 Hugo Buchser started a similar journey with his other daughter, Suzi, a "study trip" as he liked to call them, to the Middle East and Asia. There he established the magazines *Orafrica* and *The Eastern Jeweller and Watchmaker*.



The Hotel Oriente in Barcelona, a frequent stop on trips for business and pleasure. The Buchsers on the Ramblas



A journey to the Far East, Kingdom of Siam, 1950

From the Raffles hotel in Singapore to the dusty roads of India and Thailand, his confidence and social skills opened numerous doors – both commercial and spiritual. With the same lucidity, the learned businessman quickly grasped the great potential offered by the creation of the European common market, which was set up by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Almost a decade after his Argentinean "southern star", Hugo Buchser launched his European star, the magazine *Europa Star*, as well as *Eurotec*, dedicated to the machine industry. *Europa Star* would give its name to

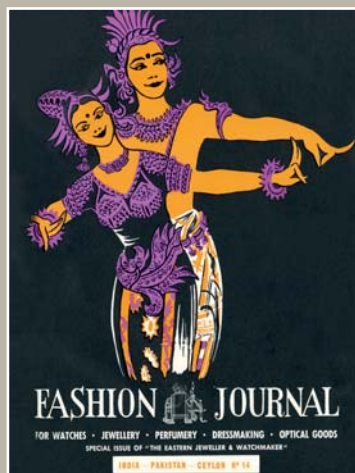
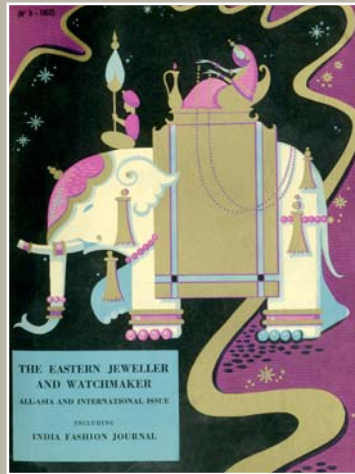
all the group's publications ten years later, under the leadership of Hugo's son-in-law and successor, Gilbert Maillard. Thus the 1950s saw a consolidation of all the projects instigated by the entrepreneur as a result of his many journeys. Under the name "Industrial Documentation Bureau", whose headquarters employed a staff of thirty in Geneva, a veritable global network of information – a kind of Internet before its time – developed for the watchmaking, jewellery and machine industries. Some fifty years after the death of the "patriarch" this continues today.



The "official" portrait of Hugo Buchser, 1959



The Tour de l'Île, the headquarters of the Industrial Documentation Bureau, Geneva



The clock ticks

It was the beautiful works of the human mind, together with encounters and adventures, which drove the rebellious Hugo Buchser even more so than his passion for watchmaking. He was a man of many faces: a dreaming artist, an intransigent yet pragmatic businessman, an authoritative father and "old-school" employer but with a non-conformist spirit marked by a freedom in the face of bourgeois values and stuffiness.

As at ease on the deck of the Queen Mary as he was on old Argentinean haciendas, this "global" personality was not one to criticise people behind their backs. His frankness and his business intuition did not spare either enemies or anyone who was envious of this man who could not bear not to have the decision in his hands. You had to face up to this rebellious and stubborn character, who constantly challenged people, in order to be appreciated. Hugo Buchser also knew how to use humour to discombobulate those around him.

One anecdote illustrates this better than any other. Renowned for organising New Year costume balls, Hugo Buchser one year announced to some thirty guests that he had invited a guest of honour – a "baron" – to the festivities. They were entreated to welcome this esteemed guest appropriately. Imagine the surprise of the honourable guests in their evening attire, who had formed



Hugo Buchser with the current editor-in-chief and managing director of the *Europa Star* publications, Pierre and Philippe Maillard, Geneva, 1960

a guard of honour, when the "baron" made his entrance.

Rather than an aristocrat, the guest was a tramp, with suitable clothes and breath, who shouted: "Hi everyone! It's party time!". A half-amused and half-meditative smile could be discerned on the matte and travel-worn face of Hugo Buchser. Few of the guests returned the following year...

The publisher kept his strong character until his death in 1961. His heritage in

the field of watchmaking lives on with the global distribution of the *Europa Star* publications. Under the management of successive generations of the Maillard-Buchser family, these publications have followed and analysed the ups and downs of the watchmaking industry, from the 1960s to the present day. They have also absorbed, with all the characteristic flexibility of their founder, the great technological leap of the past decade. But that's another story.

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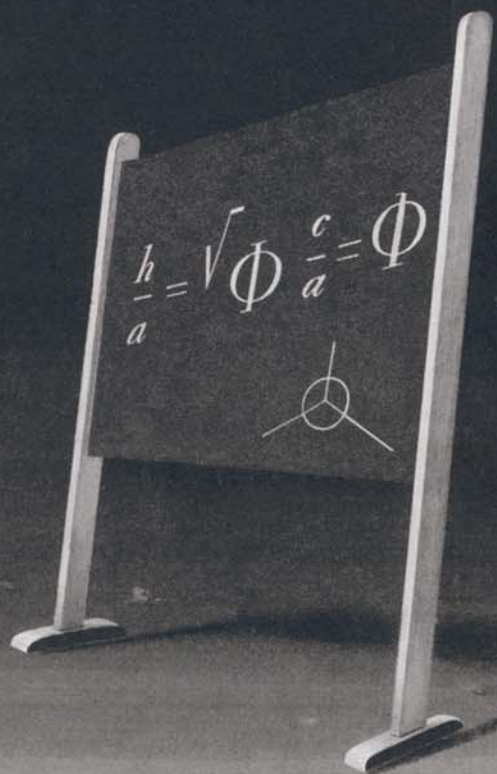
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