

HALL OF RUSSIA THE BEATING HEART OF RUSSIAN WATCHMAKING

“In 2010, I took a plane to St. Petersburg. It was the first time I’d ever visited a watch factory. There were about twenty little old men and women there, the windows were broken, it was freezing cold... I picked up the watches. They were going tick-tock. And I said to myself that with new designs, it would work,” recounts David Henderson-Stewart, before adding: “If I’d been a specialist, I would never have got involved. It was all much more complicated than I’d imagined.”

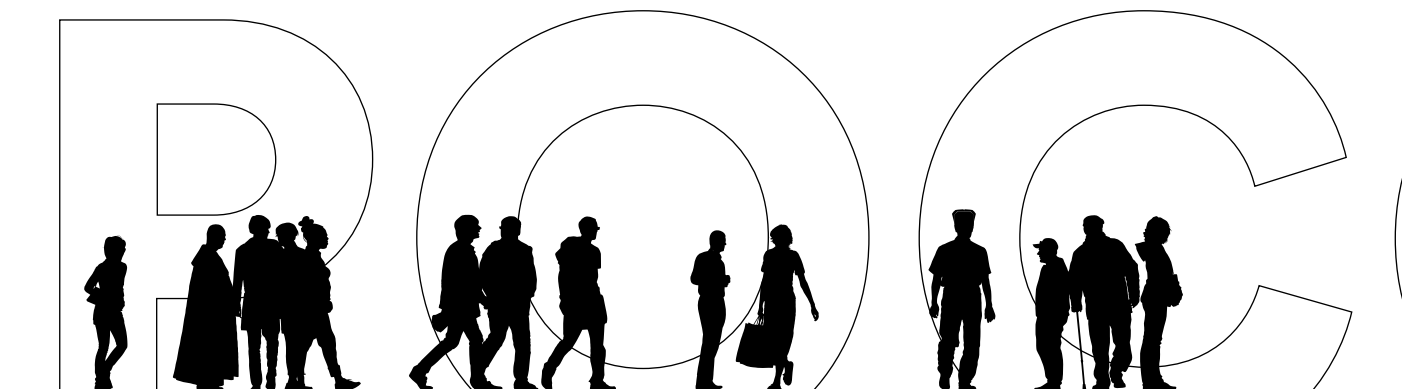
Founded in 1961 in honour of the space exploits of Yuri Gagarin (Raketa means “space rocket” in Russian), the large watchmaking factory from the period of Soviet centralisation, which produced millions of timepieces a year and employed thousands of workers, had shrunk to a tiny brand producing \$100 souvenir watches for Western tourists in search of Soviet “memorabilia”. But in actual fact, its history dates back much further than the Soviet era. Raketa is the heir to the former Imperial Peterhof Factory, founded in 1721 by the Czar Peter the Great.

David Henderson-Stewart, a young Franco-British entrepreneur (with Russian ancestry) living in Moscow, knew nothing about watchmaking, but was convinced that his project – to relaunch an important, truly Russian luxury brand for a market that buys mainly foreign high-end goods – was valid.

With Raketa, you enter a different watchmaking world, which grew up independently without reproducing western canons. And it holds numerous surprises, such as the Russian Code model, equipped with a complication allowing the hands to turn “backwards” (to follow the natural movement of the planets in the solar system); or the round hands of the Copernic model; or the triangular hands of the Avant-Garde line. The latest model launched by Raketa is a re-edition of the Polar watch from the Soviet era.

The independent watchmaker Konstantin Chaykin is another face of the new beating heart of Russia's horological scene. His latest project is not to go to the Pole, but to... Mars. A few years ago, convinced that the red planet was the new horizon for both humankind and watchmakers, he launched a programme called the “Mars Project”. The latest watch to emerge from this project can be seen on the next page – it is truly mesmerising!

Raketa and Konstantin Chaykin both embody the best of Russian watchmaking: different, quirky and surprisingly heartwarming.



POLAR by Raketa

The Russian brand relaunched the famous "Polar" watch that equipped Soviet polar explorers, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the model. This limited re-edition of 200 pieces is based on the original design and technical drawings kept in the archives of the brand. In order to allow explorers to tell the time when they had no way of knowing if it was day or night, Soviet engineers developed a movement that made the hour hand perform one rotation of the dial in 24 hours (instead of the conventional 12 hours).



MARS CONQUEROR MK3 FIGHTER by Konstantin Chaykin

The Russian watchmaker is convinced that "sooner or later, in order to survive, humanity will have to expand out into the universe." The planet Mars "currently rates as the best option for a space base." This was all it took for him to develop a horological programme dedicated to this perspective: the "Mars Time" project. The dial of his new Mars Conqueror Mk3 Fighter displays the terrestrial time, supplemented by the 24-hour time zone indicator hand, while the patented "Martian" wheel movement provides a precise indication of Martian time with two hands, without requiring an additional watch movement. As for the model's design, it is equally worthy of the red planet. Only 8 pieces in a titanium case will be released.

