

URBAN JÜRGENSEN GENESIS OF A WATCH

SUSTAINING BRAND IDENTITY IN A NEW CATEGORY (PART 1/5)

Over the coming year, independent watch company Urban Jürgensen will take us through the conceptualisation, unveiling and delivery of a brand new watch collection. In this first part, we explore the background and philosophy behind this creation.

At the helm of Urban Jürgensen for the last four years, Danish-born Søren Jenry Petersen is a man with a method. Highly articulate, he worked for decades in the telecommunications handset sector. It is with the benefit of this experience, and a keen awareness of the disruptions that can (rapidly) shake up an industry, that Petersen has taken up the challenge of directing the strategy of a 245-year-old watch company with Danish roots, today established in Biel, manufacturing fine Swiss made high-end timepieces with the use of traditional methods and applied craftsmanship.

Last year, "The Alfred" special edition charmed many with its traditional "grenage" dial, timeless design and original distribution formula: the timepiece was ready to be picked up directly at the brand's new Atelier. This opportunity to meet the people behind the watch is one of the elements that points to Urban Jürgensen's most distinctive feature: it is a brand with a human touch, made by true craftsmen for men of good taste. In an industry where the buzzword "experience" is repeated endlessly, almost mechanically, here is an actual experience.

VENTURING BEYOND CLASSIC

This year, Urban Jürgensen is ready for a major new challenge: the creation of a brand new watch collection. It was part of the strategy of the new ownership from the outset to launch a product in the vaunted

contemporary luxury stainless steel category, rightly respected and feared for its complexity of demands. It's a category that – aside from numerous "re-editions" – has been almost at a standstill for over 40 years.

Søren Jenry Petersen wants to bring something new to this segment: "I believe the time has come for a beautifully designed, clearly differentiated and well executed alternative. The benchmarks we all know, and we're approaching this task with a lot of respect". Nevertheless, the size of the market is too big to ignore, and it seems natural that Urban Jürgensen's heritage and product culture should play a role here as well.

It represents a new chapter in the 245-year history of the Urban Jürgensen brand, which to date has produced fewer than 1000 wristwatches. The company didn't begin making this type of watch until 1982 and now employs around ten people. "We start with a blank page. It's a Herculean task and undoubtedly the hardest thing to do – but maybe it's for the best!", says Petersen. He is nevertheless aided in the creation process by a method, which he has conceptualised (see graph below), and by his perspective on the Swiss watch industry, as an "outsider" from another highly competitive industrial segment: "Market conditions, technologies and history must be taken into consideration equally. Too often, brands get lost when they lose touch with their roots and their values. For Urban Jürgensen, it's all about the quality of the choices that are made".

THREE-HAND AND GMT MODELS

Some things are non-negotiable, but you'll learn more about those in our next episode. The "Concept Brief" contains a number of must-haves. The concept must be highly flexible, whether in terms of the material used (steel, bimetallic, gold), the engraving or gem stone setting. The design must be iconic and easily identifiable from all others in the market. The movement must be in-house and automatic. Water resistance must be over 100 metres. There will be a three-hand and a GMT model, the "most useful watch complication today, when done in a user-friendly fashion", as Petersen puts it. In keeping with the position of Urban Jürgensen, the pricing will be "clearly at the top end of the market" – which just underscores the need to create something truly covetable. The official launch will take place at Baselworld, with a possible pre-event beforehand.

However, many mysteries remain... A name for this new collection? What will be its final design? How will the timepiece be received by both professionals and aficionados? Søren Petersen doesn't want to unveil everything at once. First comes the method. We'll hear more details about the initial outcome soon enough.

In the next chapter, in our March edition for Baselworld, we will reveal the design of the watch and a number of important features of the new collection.

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Concept defining parameters

“ This graph represents the basic outline of my thinking process when deciding how to form a new product concept or a new design. There are three key elements: the market conditions (our environment), the strategy (based on our values, history and vision) and the technology (in our case with a network of suppliers).”

“Some of these areas seem to be left aside in the watch industry, but for me they are all an integral part of making sure a new product concept has the best possible chance of success. The order is not coincidental: one always start with the market, the competition and the clients. As for ideas, they can come from anywhere, and rarely does anyone have a monopoly on them! Then comes technology which, in the watch industry these days, focuses only on production cost optimisation and alternative use of materials.”

“For Urban Jürgensen, the most important driver of our product culture has always been balance. We rely on the quality of the choices we make. In the end, the most important driver is the authentic use of craftsmanship and materials, and making the right choices there alongside thoughtful, classically restrained design. For instance, we will make our GMT piece adjustable for time zones with no need to actually even look at the watch.”

Søren Jenny Petersen, President and CEO of Urban Jürgensen, January 2019

