

BULGARI

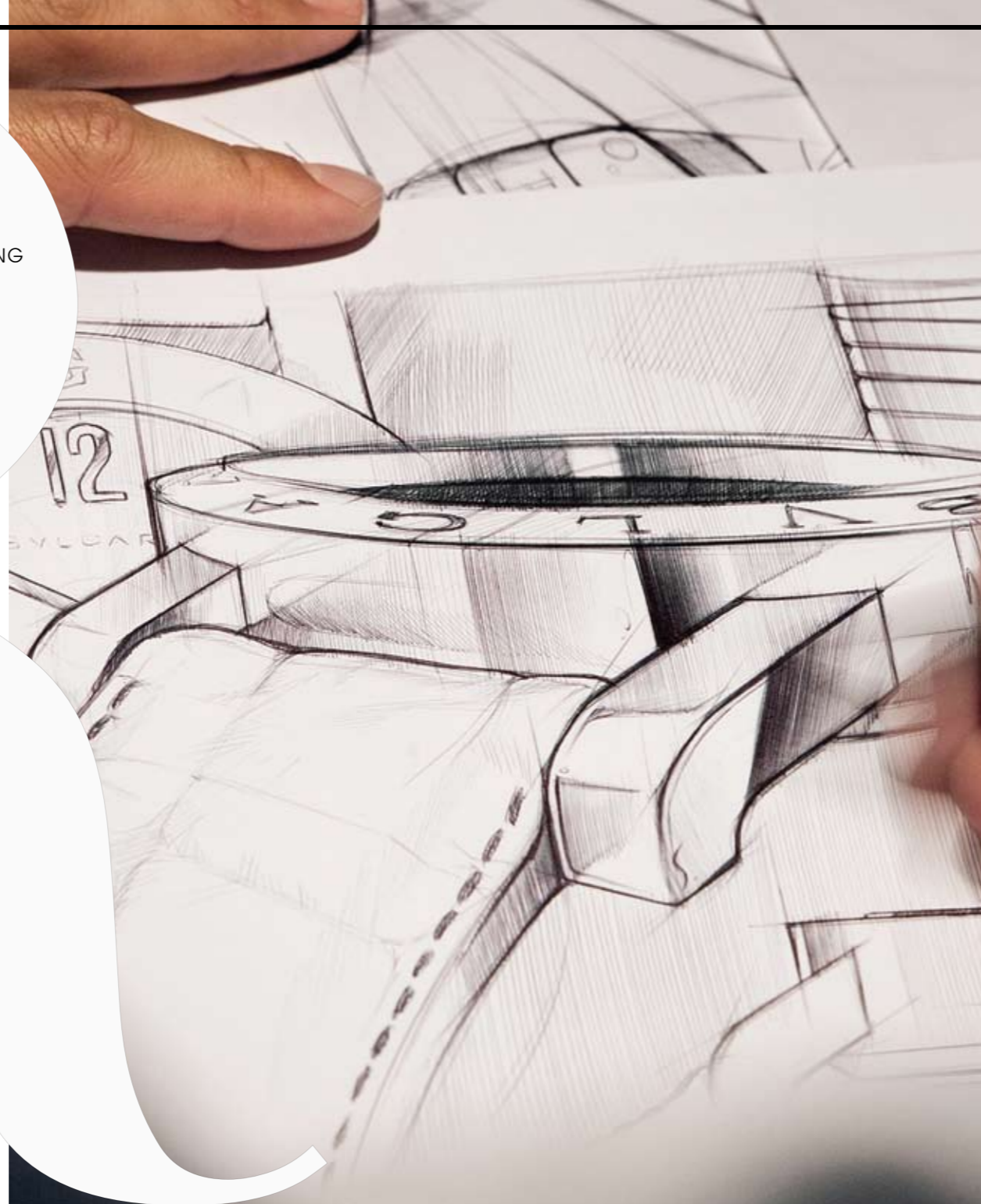
RED CARPET JEWELLER BULGARI HAS BEEN BUSY EARNING ITS STRIPES AS HOROLOGY'S LATEST HIGH-ROLLER.

It's the watchmaking equivalent of landing a man on the moon – conceiving, designing and making the intricate heart of a mechanical watch, the movement, entirely in-house. This year, after a decade-long genesis, Italian luxury brand Bulgari has taken that quantum leap to establish a serious foothold in haute horology's elite. The introduction of movement BVL 168 (named after the number of its components) follows the continual evolution of Bulgari watches, including the full integration of the stylish Daniel Roth and Gerald Genta marques, that Bulgari absorbed in 2000.

It's a journey that's probably been closer to one man's heart than any in the 200-strong workforce of Bulgari's watchmaking division – Guido Terreni, Managing Director of the company's Watch Business Unit. "This long industrial development couldn't miss the heart of the watch, the mechanical movement... it's (also) a question of integrity and credibility to offer a product that isn't just designed and assembled, but also fully mastered in its manufacturing," says Terreni.

The BVL 168 movement, officially launched at Baselworld last March, also required exceptional high standards of functionality, manufacture and quality control. Terreni says it needed to offer an instantaneous central date function, strong torque that would allow mounting of additional functions in the future and a bidirectional oscillating mass. On top of that, it had to be able to charge the barrel both ways, include a balance bridge, to increase the sturdiness of the regulating organ, and use maillechort (German silver), to increase the rigidity of construction.

While base Bulgari models start from around \$4000, you'll have to dig much deeper in your wallet for other pieces, depending on the complications featured (moon-phase indicators, chronograph functions) and materials used. The mind-boggling Grande Sonnerie, a 'chiming' watch that Terreni likens to a miniature musical instrument, comes in at close to a million dollars. "Chiming watches are



not only Grandes Complications, but also musical instruments. As such, they need to produce a sound with the correct tonality, the ideal timber and the right timing to generate a melody. Through its Manufacture de Haute Horlogerie in Le Sentier, Bulgari is able to reach the peak of the mountain in this extraordinary watchmaking art," he says.

The Grande Sonnerie's movement features four tiny hammers that generate four specific notes, the sound of Westminster's Big Ben, and a staggering 863 handcrafted parts. Each one takes an entire year to make. Other new Bulgari releases include the Tourbillon Rattrapante (Daniel Roth Collection, \$196,000), the Octo Chronographe Quadri-Retro (Gerald Genta Collection, \$63,600) and Octo Repetition Minutes Retro (Gerald Genta, \$318,000). Terreni says it takes "personality, executed with an extraordinary quality" to determine what makes a great watch.

"Take, for example, the new Serpenti. Women literally fall in love with such a timepiece because of its uniqueness, its embracing feeling and its values deeply rooted in the brand's DNA. But when you hold the watch in your hands, you feel the quality of its construction, the perfect integration within its elements. The same I could say of a male watch. A strong personality crafted with top watchmaking skills blended together thanks to a unique Italian taste in aesthetics."

As to why men, in particular, find mechanical watches so fascinating, Terreni says: "These aren't simply objects. It's not for their functionality that men are passionate. If that would be the case, a basic quartz watch or mobile phone would do. If you get into watchmaking you enter a world of extreme challenges, conceptually in the construction and executionally in the manufacturing of its components. The more you push, the more the game gets exclusive. It's not merely a question of price, but also of understanding certain sophistications."

Terreni is reluctant to single out one specific Bulgari piece as his favourite ("It's like you ask a father with three sons to tell you which he prefers!") but admits to a fondness for the Diagono case. "I love the construction, its bold personality but with somehow classical proportions," he muses.

Now, entering a new phase as a 'manufacture' (the industry term for watchmakers who produce their own movement), Bulgari has raised the stakes even higher to stand as one of watchmaking's best. Terreni sums up the ultimate task succinctly: "The great challenge is to beat convention, without being eccentric."

BOUTIQUE BOX CLOX



BOX BRIEF

BEGINNINGS ■ Bulgari first produced watches in the 1920s but did not set up a specialised watchmaking arm, Bulgari Time, until 1982

BRANDING ■ Bulgari's trademark is often written 'Bvlgari' in ancient Roman style, and is named after Greek Sotirios Boulgaris, who founded the company in Rome in 1884

BLOCKBUSTER ■ Tony Stark (played by Robert Downey Jr) wore a Bulgari Diagono Complication in the smash hit 2008 film *Iron Man*

BESPOKE ■ The Diagono Phases de Lune model has a complication to display the moon's phases; the watch movement has 347 hand-finished components, that require 3120 separate steps during production, and is subject to 350 separate quality control stages