

A Historic Brand

**An Interview with Jean-Marie Schaller,
Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Les Ateliers Louis Moinet SA**

EDITORS' NOTE *The founder of Les Ateliers Louis Moinet in 2003, CEO Jean-Marie Schaller was previously the Marketing Director and a member of the board of directors for Lacoste Watches, where he increased sales in the span of a year from 50,000 to 160,000 units. In 1994, he created the company Perrelet SA, and received five nominations for "Watch of the Year." Prior to that, Schaller was the Marketing and Management Consultant for Mental Fruit, located in France.*



Jean-Marie Schaller

Currently, he is a member and auditor of the Swiss Exhibitors Committee for BASELWORLD. Schaller previously served as a lecturer at the International Watch Marketing Meetings; contributor to the Journal Suisse d'Horlogerie, a leading trade magazine; and a correspondent for Werbung and Le Pays, a Swiss advertising magazine and daily newspaper.

COMPANY BRIEF *Located in the foothills of the Jura Mountains in Auviernier, Switzerland, and founded in 2003, Les Ateliers Louis Moinet (www.louismoinet.com) manufactures watches based on the notable work of talented watchmaker Louis Moinet (1768-1853). Renowned for their exquisite craftsmanship and one-of-a-kind creations, the company offers limited edition watches that feature the highest levels of creativity, design, watchmaking expertise, and exclusivity.*

Are you happy with the awareness of the Louis Moinet brand?

Yes. You have to understand that Louis Moinet is an historical brand, with roots dating back as far as the 18th and 19th centuries. We relaunched this brand a few years ago, and the brand awareness is surprisingly high in the trade. We also have quite a good interest from the editors of the trade publications. So we have quickly gained some recognition. Now, among the public, of course, we have groundwork to lay.

How broad is the collection? Will there be changes in the foreseeable future?

Every year, we have limited editions comprised of new models. Each new model has three dials, and each one is limited to 60 pieces. This means that we are one of the most exclusive brands in the world. Our actual production in past years has been only a few hundred watches.

Now, we are growing. This year we have a plan to develop ourselves. We have excellent contacts with top distributors in various countries. Our goal for total production in five years time is 1,000 to 1,500 watches, which will keep our exclusivity at a very high level.

Is it a niche market?

Absolutely. Very exclusive, very selective.

What are the key markets where you plan to distribute the brand? Are there opportunities in emerging markets?

Yes. Today our main markets are Japan, Hong Kong, and Russia. Soon, we will be in Spain. We also have customers in the Czech Republic. Our targets are Singapore, Malaysia, and the United States.

Your pieces still have a handcrafted feel to them. Is technology playing a role in their design or production? Will there always be a need for the hand touch?

We want to have both. Louis Moinet was one of the greatest watchmakers ever. He produced works of art: clocks for two American Presidents, pieces for Napoleon, King George IV of England, and other royalty in Europe. His client base was always quite distinguished. His creations were always a mixture of art and technology. Our focus today is still on art and technology, which gives us a unique position in the market. At the BASELWORLD trade show [in Basel, Switzerland], we showed a brand new range of watches, which are a mixture of these two fields. We have applied for two patents and we will show some watches that look very different from what exists today.

With a brand history like yours, how important is customer relations?

We want to be very selective, and we want to select our partners for the quality of their service. So distributors and retailers should be at the highest level, and should thus provide the highest level service to our public.

Is there opportunity for product differentiation?

Yes. As I said before, Louis Moinet was an



inventor. He produced different movements with a unique function. Today, our movements are usually very rare. In many cases, we're the only one using these movements. Normally, they possess some special functions as well. We applied for patents to have a different look and a different function. For instance, we are working on a tourbillon and a retrograde watch which will have a very special look. It is unique – something that has not existed before. Specifically, we focus on the male market. We have some ladies watches as well, but we have to take it step by step. And the first step is to establish a foothold in the male market.

Is it important that new pieces take into account the history and tradition of the brand?

Absolutely. They have to carry the Louis Moinet DNA. In 1848, Moinet wrote a book about watches, one of the nicest books on watchmaking in that century. It took him 20 years to write it. It is a great source of inspiration for us. So our watches today are a reflection of Mr. Moinet's work, but at the same time, we don't want to be a dusty brand. We want to have contemporary expression of what Mr. Moinet would think today. So we want to be modern, but still have the Louis Moinet DNA.

Do you see opportunities for product extensions for the brand? Or will there always be a specific focus on watches?

We have had some requests for leather articles or scarves for ladies. Louis Moinet was a watchmaker and I think, once again, it is important to really focus on a niche. So for the time being, we have no plans other than for watches.

Is it challenging to retain talented watchmakers?

The watchmaking industry is very much a cottage industry. There are still a lot of people who want to be independent, because watchmaking is in their blood. Maybe their fathers and grandfathers were watchmakers. We are positioned as an independent company. We like to share the history of Louis Moinet. We listen to each other, and with this type of management, we have had success in keeping talented people. ●

The Louis Moinet Twintech with a 120-hour power reserve