

The Capacity to Innovate

An Interview with
François-Paul Journe, Founder, Montres Journe SA



EDITORS' NOTE A high-end watch manufacturer in Switzerland who designs innovative and unique movements, François-Paul Journe began his career in his uncle's antique restoration shop in Paris and built his first tourbillon pocket watch at the age of 20. He set up his first workshop on the rue de Verneuil in Paris in 1985, and in 1987, became a laureate of the Fondation de la vocation. He was the recipient of the Balancier d'Or Prize in 1989, received the Gaia Watchmaker of the Year award in 1994, and recently won his third Aiguille d'Or (Golden Hand), the ultimate prize at the annual Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève. In 2006, he was honored with the title of Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by the French Minister of Culture. Journe earned his watchmaker's diploma from Ecole d'horlogerie de Paris in 1977.



François-Paul Journe

COMPANY BRIEF The motto for the F.P. Journe brand is *Invenit et Fecit* (Latin for "invented and made") and denotes that the company builds the entirety of the watches. Journe designs new movements, even inventing completely new mechanisms, like the resonance chronometer. F.P. Journe (www.fpjourne.com) watches are available around the world through his own six boutiques in Paris, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Beijing, Geneva, and New York and a few select authorized retailers.

Would you provide an overview of the F.P. Journe collection and highlight some of the new pieces that you plan to introduce to the market in the coming year?

We launched the Octa UTC-Universal Time, Coordinated in January, offering the current view of time zone division directly linked to the real rotation of the earth and less variable. This F.P. Journe patented system uses the modern standards of determining time zones in full hours and indicates mechanically the different time periods linked with the earth's geographical positions, with the specific addition of the summer and winter hour.

In June, we presented the first model of the new Sport Line collection, a series of watches with an unusual very light material; its all aluminium case, bracelet and also movement make it the first of its kind. I am also working on a special timepiece with the utmost chronometric precision. In addition, we

are finalizing a line of women's watches with an unprecedented movement, specifically designed for women.

F.P. Journe is a leader in limited editions watches. Would you highlight some of these special pieces?

We are offering limited edition watches reserved exclusively for sale in the F.P. Journe Boutiques – such as the Black Label Collection, available to owners of an F.P. Journe watch only – or the Boutique Anniversary Editions, celebrating the creation of the first boutique in Tokyo. We have also launched Limited

Series of Ruthenium timepieces and the astounding timekeeper Vagabondage, with its unusual flat turtle shape, which conveys an incredible story.

How has the global economic crisis impacted the luxury watch segment and what is your outlook for growth for F.P. Journe?

When 50 percent of the hypothetical wealth is disappearing, the global business is impacted.

So we had to deal with a network of retailers that were close to bankruptcy. This confirmed that the sales control is as important as the manufacturing control.

Our development is controlled through the mastering of all stakeholders.

The watch industry is very competitive in the luxury segment. How difficult is it to differentiate and how do you define what makes F.P. Journe watches unique?

Facing an important variety of watches, if clients are going to buy my watches, they must display an important difference. Overall, I am conceiving the watches I want to make, without looking to the outside, and it seems that my work must be different if one looks at the number of brands I have inspired. Twenty years ago, people considered it odd to see screws on my dials, but not anymore.

F.P. Journe is known as a leading luxury brand. How do you define the target market for the brand and has the profile of your clientele evolved over the years?

The question is, What is luxury? One tends to mix pure luxury with brands that represent mass luxury. My clients don't buy F.P. Journe watches for show, but for themselves in a discreet manner. And this hasn't changed.

F.P. Journe is known for its craftsmanship. How much of a role is technology playing in the design and production of your watches?

The design of a watch is conditioned by its dimension; it is not possible to express oneself like one would do in sculpture or in painting.

Technology is always closely linked to design as the position of the hands is relative to the movement technology.

The capacity to innovate gives the freedom of creation in design. One who uses an industrial movement has only a very small amount of freedom.

F.P. Journe is the leader in complicated movements. Would you highlight your strength in this regard?

Finding new mechanical hints has always fascinated me. I have discovered this enthusiasm for complications by studying the works of our past watch masters. A complication becomes beautiful only when it is sufficiently simplified in order to guarantee optimal functioning.

Would you highlight the distribution channels for the brand and the key markets for F.P. Journe?

Our network is composed of the best existing retailers with a network of six boutiques in our own name and controlled by us spearheading the operation. We are only producing 900 watches per year and we are not after a specific key market. In the coming years, it will be essential for us to focus on all the major economic crossroads.

Would you highlight your key priorities for F.P. Journe for the coming year to continue the growth and success that you have been experiencing?

To continue making watches is a constant search for chronometric precision, with innovative movements that no one else has, accompanied by simple but beautiful dials.

My choices are driven by quality and not quantity, and our production will always remain the same – the way we do watches will never change. Horology is more than a passion; it is my life, and I do everything it takes to reflect that in all my watches. I have too much respect for our past watch masters to produce them otherwise.

Marketing tells many incongruous absurdities to its clients. But there are fundamentals that pertain, since over 150 years in watch-making, to do a unique piece, these fundamentals need to be respected. A watch is made to give the time – that is its priority, but a great watch gives the time with the utmost precision. ●

F.P. Journe's Octa UTC (left) and Souveraine Centigraphe (right)