



The founders of two avant-garde, rule-breaking watch companies share their vision. By Dylan Tan

The independents

THERE'S one name watch aficionados trust when they're looking for cutting-edge horological masterpieces. Yafriro, the multi-brand luxury timepiece boutique founded by ex-tailor Iwan Hew, has been breaking independent brands such as Richard Mille, Parmigiani Fleurier and Glashutte since 2001 here and turning them into the household names they are today.

Its flagship boutique at Paragon was recently renovated for an undisclosed sum and the space is now not only roomier but it has also been further brightened up by its glittery shop-in-shop concept for haute jewellery brand Leviev.

But one thing remains the same though; Yafriro continues to champion independents and three new brands – Antoine Martin, Brevia and Hysek – have recently

been introduced.

Each possesses its own avant-garde DNA strand and are leaders in their fields for breaking watchmaking rules. The founders of two of the brands, Antoine Martin and Brevia, were in town late last year to meet with collectors and sat down with *The Business Times* to discuss their vision for the brands.

ANTOINE MARTIN

The name Antoine Martin might sound unfamiliar but the name Martin Braun is bound to ring a bell with watch collectors because of the latter's work for various big brands over the last three decades as well as the revolutionary sunrise-sunset watch he created in the mid-1990s before launching it in the 2001 with his namesake brand.

MAGIC

Antoine Martin's Slow Runner beats at an unconventional 7,200 beats per hour, and exposes an outsized balance wheel on its back

formed on their faces."

BREVA

Not every luxury watch needs to be pampered with tender loving care 24/7; Brevia's timepieces are tough enough to survive any climate and can even forecast the weather. Its Genie 01 is the world's first mechanical wristwatch with an altimeter and barometer to forecast the weather. The proprietary movement is the brainchild of Jean-Francois Mojon, founder of creative watchmaking collective Chronode.

It all started when Vincent Dupontreue decided he wanted to own a nice timepiece on his 33rd birthday in 2010. That inspired him to start his own high-end Swiss watch company; the name comes from La Brevia, a warm southern wind that contributes to the mild micro-climate around Lake Como in Northern Italy where Dupontreue was vacationing.

After three years of R&D led by Mojon, Brevia launched the Genie 01 last year. It's a highly sophisticated watch that will require its owner to at least browse the instruction manual once to know how to operate it but Dupontreue says that's exactly the point.

"We want the owner to touch and play with it; it's like giving a new toy to a child," he explains, while screwing and unscrewing the various crowns on the Genie 01 to demonstrate how the difference in air pressures measured by the watch over different periods of the day allow the watch to forecast the weather.

Mojon reveals the biggest challenge was to try and squeeze all the components into the watch's 45mm case so as to keep it at a wearable size; as well as using materials that are not traditionally found in watchmaking for the timepiece to perform its weather forecast function.

Dupontreue, who comes from a fashion background having worked for the likes of Chanel, Louis Vuitton and Ermenegildo Zegna, insists that's all in a day's work for Brevia. "We want to be radical and not be like the rest of the Swiss watch industry (which can be very traditional)," he says. "I like to think outside of the watch case."

Yafriro Paragon
290 Orchard Road, #01-28A/29
☎ 6333 6663/8 | Email: info@yafriro.com

BRIGHT

Yafriro's Paragon store was recently renovated and now also houses haute jewellery brand Leviev. Far right: Brevia's Genie 01 is a highly sophisticated watch with an ingenious weather forecast function



This despite the fact that Braun's thunder was slightly stolen by Audemars Piguet (AP) who also unveiled its Equation of Time timepiece – a high-complication perpetual calendar watch that had a similar sunrise-sunset function – the same year to celebrate its 125th anniversary.

But the German watchmaker says the bad timing might have worked in his favour because critics and collectors lauded the newcomer instead for matching up to AP's expertise and technical prowess despite being relatively a newcomer.

It also led to a stint where Braun operated his brand under the Franck Muller group though that was short-lived.

He's since joined forces with another watch industry veteran, Bruno Jufer, as CEO to launch his new brand, Antoine Martin, to realise his decade-old vision of a technologically advanced watch movement featuring his own High Performance Escape-ment that uses silicium for increased energy yield.

Braun also "slowed down" time last year with the Slow Runner – a watch that beats at a very unconventional 7,200 beats per hour. It also features something unique in most Antoine Martin timepieces – a bier-than-usual exposed balance wheel.

"I always tell people the Slow Runner is a magic watch because when they first see it with the dial faced up, it looks like a normal watch," says Braun. "But the moment they flip it over (and see the balance wheel spinning), you see a huge smile being

