

Interview: Roger W. Smith independent watchmaker of the North

Are you ready to warm yourself with a huge blast of wind of passion that comes direct by the Isle of Man? There lives and creates his masterpieces the independent watchmaker Roger Smith. He's the direct heir of George Daniel's knowledge; today in the meanwhile he answers to my questions, he unveils his vision with some aspects of his brilliant personality.



As the watchmaker of the past Century highlighted George Daniels name, your mentor, do you think you'll be able to succeed to him in the actual?

At the moment I am still quite young, with a long way to go before I could meet a challenge like that, certainly when you consider that the amount of knowledge one needs in watchmaking is immense and virtually endless. My small steps of combining the two wheels of the co-axial escapement seem insignificant compared to George's achievements, however I am always trying to improve on every watch I make. All that I can do is my very best, the same as George always did, and keep building upon what I have achieved so far.

Don't you think that nowadays horology is following too much the behaviour of technology? Are we taking too much distance from traditionality?

Well, yes, I do; one could say that this is a large reason that drives the way that I work. The essence of a watch is in fact quite traditional in nature: if you take away all the fashionable aspects of many wristwatches today, the mechanical essential is what remains. Real beauty, mechanical and visual, is something that will look and work fantastically 200 years from now, as well as next year. Technology is important of course;

however, it should only be a medium to get somewhere, to achieve something, and not an end unto itself.

Was is difficult for a twenty-two year old watchmaker to hold the thirst to demonstrate his skills during the seemed long and slow period of your apprenticeship period?

If you get to know me better, you will find that although I am quiet and thoughtful in nature, I am tough as nails on the inside, and I don't know what the words 'giving up' mean. No one can do things for you, you must do them yourself, and get on with it. Challenges, and there were many, believe me, during my schooling and apprenticeship, are something that I thrive on. Without that drive, I would never have got here today.

What is your vision? How do you realize it in your creations?

We touched on this a bit already: a watch should be the epitome of perfect visual and mechanical design in a perfect balance with each other. Concretely, this means no technology just to show off, only technology that's useful- as well as no visual frills that can lose their appeal after a short time when tastes have changed. The Daniels Co-axial is a perfect example of such a really useful and brilliant technological advance. My visual designs and layout of hands, dials, cases, movements etc. are mine, but always refer to older traditions. So in this way they embody the best of all worlds.



By your opinion – following the tradition - which is the mechanical part of a watch that could see more improvement in the next years?

There will always be room for improvements regarding new escapements and issues of friction. This is an almost metaphysical problem or equation for watchmaking that can never be solved- it's like trying to resolve the number π . It might also happen that a new

material really proves itself valuable for watchmaking over a period of many years, becoming a real part of the watchmaker's arsenal of materials. At the moment however, most new materials in watchmaking, despite their imagery, are being used as superficial fashion statements and have no long term usage like gold, brass, steel, copper, silver and platinum have had for centuries if not thousands of years.

Which was the biggest inconvenience that occurred developing one of your watches and how did you solve it?

Learning how to make things look as if they just 'appeared out of nowhere' to quote George. Creating a wristwatch with a fluency and ease that makes the hand work behind them almost invisible.

If you weren't a watchmaker what do you think you would do in your life?

I can't imagine being anything else! but I'm sure that it would have been something practical, and I would have striven to be the best at it, whatever it was!

Roger W. Smith, was born in 1970 in Bolton, Lancashire, UK. Smith was a Bronze Medallist of the British Horological Institute (awarded to the most outstanding graduating student of any given year). After moving at Isle of Man and assisting George Daniels he opened his own workshop. (Wikipedia)

At the moment he's the own person authorized – apart Omega who bought the licence – to use the Co-axial escapement in his mechanical movements.

To Massimo and all the visitors
of Orologi di Classe, in appreciation of
their love for fine watchmaking traditions.
Happy New Year and all the best
for 2011.

Roger W. Smith

Roger's interview ends with his personal dedication to all of us, enthusiasts of this magic world: "To Massimo and all the visitors of Orologi di Classe, in appreciation of their love for fine watchmaking traditions".

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