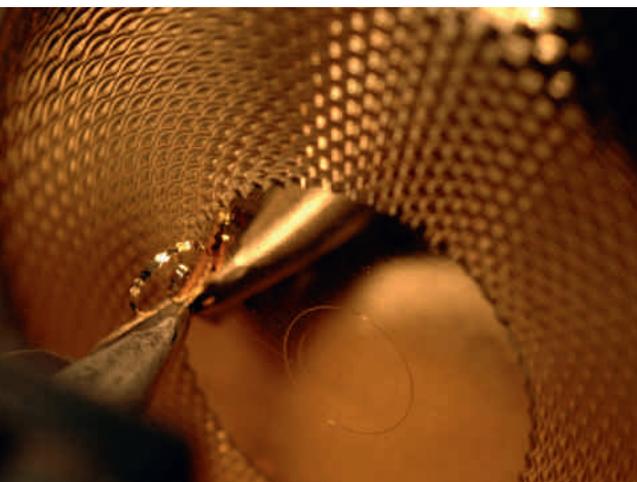


The art of **GUILLOCHAGE**

Paul O'Neil



was taken over entirely by Metalem in 1998 and specialised in the guilloché of dials. My father then set up his own workshop to do guilloché on steel and oscillating masses. We created the company Décors Guillochés SA in 2003 and moved to Cernier in 2005. [Editor's note: RVK Guillochage SA is based in the next village of Chézard-Saint-Martin].

So what exactly is guilloché?

YVK: There was a lot less ambiguity about the term when I first started working in guilloché because it always referred to *hand* guilloché. Nowadays you may see a component described as guilloché when it is in fact stamped. But by definition, guilloché involves removing material. There is also numerical control guilloché.



Yann von Känel

S Switzerland's bucolic Val-de-Ruz region does not command as many column inches as the better-known centres of excellence in Swiss watchmaking. But it was in the small town of Fontainemelon, on the ridge that separates Neuchâtel and La Chaux-de-Fonds, that the first movement-blank factory in the group of Ebauches SA companies was established. Now part of the Swatch Group's ETA movement division, the factory continues to dominate the town. What is perhaps even less well known is that the next two villages as you travel east out of Fontainemelon are something of a hub for the artistic craft of guilloché. Yann von Känel, Director of Décors Guillochés SA, which employs 10 guillocheurs at its workshop in Cernier, explained the reasons for this and shared his thoughts on the art of guilloché with *Europa Star*.

Tell us about the history of guilloché in the-Val de-Ruz.

Yann von Känel: After working for twelve years at a factory that produced stamping tools, my father set up a workshop with his friends L'Eplattenier and Blandenier, who were hand engravers. It was here that he learned the art of guilloché and the company gained a reputation for the guilloché of dials and oscillating masses. It drew the attention of Stern créations (Geneva) and Metalem (Le Locle) and, when L'Eplattenier and Blandenier retired in 1996, the company was acquired jointly by my father and Metalem. Since renamed RVK Guillochage SA in 1997, the company

Numerical control guilloché? How does that work?

YVK: We teach the machines how to do it using the techniques of guilloché by hand. This means, of course, that you first need to be able to do the guilloché by hand and have all the experience of using machines for hand guilloché. You need intuition to understand how these machines work. A machine operator could do numerical control guilloché, but he would approach things from a mechanical point of view and you would see the difference in the end result.

How can you tell the difference between these different types of guilloché?

YVK: Sometimes it can be difficult to see the difference between the two but sometimes you can see that the pattern on a stamped piece is too perfect and the decoration looks



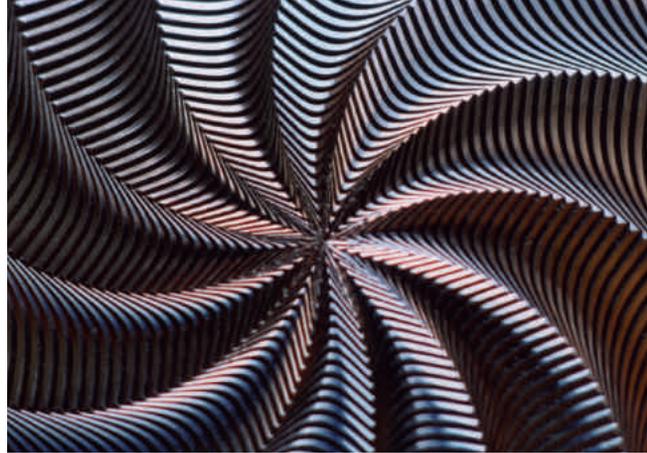
GUILLOCHAGE

Extra-thin self-winding Classique Tourbillon by Breguet

Breguet is renowned for the guillochage on the dials of its timepieces, which create refined yet sober backgrounds that allow the indications to be read clearly and do not crowd out the off-set tourbillon on this piece. Like the 42mm diameter case, the dial is also in 18-carat gold and has been silvered and engine turned by hand. The Breguet Calibre 581DR that powers this piece at a frequency of 4Hz has a lateral lever escapement in silicon and anti-magnetic steel, a silicon balance spring, small seconds mounted on the tourbillon and a power reserve of 90 hours.



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“flat”. Also, the finer the decoration, the more easily you can see the difference between the two, which is why many brands prefer a coarser decoration.

What effect has the resurgence in the artistic crafts had on your business?

YVK: We have more and more customers requesting guillochage but even the higher end brands still want to do volume production using industrial methods. They only reserve a small percentage of their production for the exceptional, hand guilloché pieces but that is where they focus all their communication. We know that there is a lot of demand for stamping and for numerical control guillochage because we offer this as well so we have a good overview of the market. A number of our customers have brought guillochage in-house, with varying degrees of success. Some of them are now coming back to us because we offer better quality and at a better price. It may seem surprising but it's a question of technology – we have all the machines required and the simple principle of individual responsibility within our workshop, where each guillocheur does their own quality control.

Can a guilloché part be repaired?

YVK: Guilloché work is quite difficult to repair because you need to find the exact same tool and, ideally, the same machine as well, which makes it easier to re-do the piece. On a case, you can always remove the decoration, polish the case and re-do the decoration. If we know how the decoration was done on a case, we can sometimes repair it.

What is the biggest challenge you face at the moment?

YVK: The biggest problem is the lack of any standards for guilloché work. For example, there is a 20 per cent difference in price between a cartouche that is produced using numerical control and one that is done by hand. But both can be referred to as “hand guilloché”. ■

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