

Polished Finn

Stepan Sarpaneva's machined cases reflect a diverse design background

BY CURTIS THOMSON

With a family lineage of renowned designers and craftsmen, it would seem Stepan Sarpaneva was predestined to follow suit. This, however, wasn't so clear to this Finnish watchmaker.

"I was surrounded by art and design as a youth, but I wasn't 'educated' as such... it was just around," he explains. "My interest in design came much later, with the launching of Sarpaneva Watches, but my home environment must

have informed me indirectly. My desire to work with my hands was evident early on though. I enjoyed restoring old cars and motorcycles and still do it," he adds, as he motions to a Moto Guzzi motorcycle in his workshop.

He entered the Finnish School of Watchmaking in Tapiola, Finland, in 1989. The school is recognized as one of the finest horological training grounds in the world today, with many of its graduates working in Switzerland.

After his graduation, and two years of knocking about in Finland, he went in 1994 to Neuchâtel, Switzerland, to attend the five-month refresher course at WOSTEP. This course provided him insight and opportunity.

Three years with Piaget's after-sales followed his classwork at WOSTEP. This was a productive time that provided an understanding of the ground level workings of the watchmaking industry and propelled the young Sarpaneva to

Left: The former Nokia Cable Factory is now home for many artists and businesses, including Sarpaneva Watches. (Photo ©Marja Helander)

Below: The first LOISTE version, with Turbiini rotor. The 3-dimensional dials are machined by Sarpaneva and offered in gold-plated brass or brushed aluminium.





This LOISTE II features in-house moonphase and specially machined dial in gold-plated brass or brushed aluminium. Note the tapering of decorative dial elements.



return to WOSTEP for a course on complicated watches.

His studies complete, he found himself working in a place to be envied by any watchmaker wanting to practice real watchmaking, the Parmigiani workshop under the tutelage of Kari Voutilainen.

From 1997 to 1999 Stepan worked closely with his countryman, Voutilainen.

“This was the most valuable experience of my career,” he recalls. “Working with Kari I learned how to make watches cor-

rectly, traditionally, to the most exacting standards.”

In the Parmigiani workshop Sarpaneva made piece-unique watches for private clients, with all complications. He also made private label watches and restored complicated watches and clocks, something the Parmigiani workshop still maintains today.

Meeting Vianney

As rewarding as this period was, the time had come for a change. A chance meeting with the mad

maestro, Vianney Halter, provided Sarpaneva the opportunity.

“My one year (2000-01) working with Vianney was an eye opener. There are no limits for him; everything is possible, and there is a sense of freedom that permits creative thinking and interesting work.”

Utilizing his skills to the full, he began prototyping new projects immediately, as well as building the VH models Antiqua, Classic and the Goldpfeil watches. It should come as no surprise that



Mechanical and cool, the Supernova is full of visual impact, with over 40 modifications and improvements to its motor, including moonphase, sub-seconds and a super finish on the hands.

to learn that the seeds for his creative designs were planted while working in these fertile grounds.

With such creativity abound, one might expect Sarpaneva to venture off on his own and develop his own watches, but instead he decided to improve his skill even further with a move to the house of Christophe Claret—the renowned manufacturer of complicated movements.

The work at Claret was a complication playground of the

highest order, with tourbillons, repeaters, perpetual calendars and a variety of complication cocktails filling his three years at the Claret Le Locle workshop. In particular, Stepan was one of the few watchmakers responsible for the building the Westminster minute repeater. It was a most challenging movement. Due to its complexity and his skill at mastering them, he was asked to continue building them for Claret, as an independent, after leaving the company.

This was a strong testament to not only Sarpaneva's great skill, but also the need for such highly talented watchmakers in the industry.

In 2004 he left Switzerland to start Sarpaneva Watches in Helsinki, Finland. Sitting in his workshop, which used to be the Nokia Cable Factory, he says, "I wanted to be my own boss. I was tired of making watches for other brands, for other people. It was time. Plus, I missed Finland."



The Supernova dissected. Note how the lugs may be removed to maintain proper finishing of the case. The steel skeleton dial may be had with various color treatments.

Current lineup

Being home nurtured his efforts. He now offers eight collections to date. The Loiste and Supernova are his current offerings.

The Loiste (the Finnish word for shine, glory) has two evolutions: Loiste and Loiste II. Both use the ETA 2824-A2 automatic movement and both cases are made from Stavax ESR steel, which is extremely hard and durable.

The case design was inspired by a Harley Davidson kick-start pinion and has removable lugs to

facilitate easy and proper refinishing of the case. Both 37 mm (also available in 39 mm) cases may be fitted with the Sarpaneva "Turbiini" winding mass that creates, depending on the version, a turbine-like or kaleidoscope-like spectacle for the owners' pleasure.

While both Loiste's share the same case details, the Loiste II's movement includes a moon-phase, which is an in-house addi-



Sarpaneva's well-used lathe is evidence that real watchmaking takes place in his workshop. The mirror-polished hands of the Supernova are executed to the highest standards. This level of finishing is often referred to "black" polishing, which is easy to understand in this photo. Note how brilliantly the bevels shine and contrast the flat surface. The light affects the hands brilliantly on these watches.

tion featuring his unique, specially machined, dial from gold-plated made from brass or aluminum.

The Supernova refines the Loiste's case with more contours and interplay between polished and satin services. The larger 40 mm case makes a clear statement. The Supernova has over 40 in-house or modified parts to bring this cosmic delight to life. Starting with an ETA 2824-A2 with a center seconds movement, Stepan turns it into a sub-seconds movement and adds a moonphase.

In-house hands that are beveled and mirror polished to the highest possible standards demonstrate his first class hand making skills and are shining objects cast against the cool open dial exposing the monochromatic world beneath. The Supernova comes with the custom "Turbiini" case-back and rotor arrangement and is a limited series of ten pieces.

Sarpaneva will end production of the Loiste and Supernova this year. However, the theme will continue with Supernova 2 some-

time in 2009.

A superb watchmaker with a unique approach, Sarpaneva goes against the norm for most independents by starting small and building slowly, increasing the complexity of his watches as his client list grows. A most sensible practice and, if the results of his recent watches are any indication, the stars are his limit. ☺

Curtis Thomson is the founder of www.tempered-online.com, a website dedicated to independent artists and craftsmen, including Sarpaneva.