

Haldimann H11 – two faces of time

World premiere: the first watch with central balance and central indication of time

Before we begin let us sit back for a moment and contemplate Beat Haldimann's previous creations: it all began with the H1, Beat's unrivalled central tourbillon. An enormous balance bedazzled us with its dance performed in a sophisticated cage positioned in the middle of a classic dial. When we put our ears close enough to the prestigious case the H1 bestowed on us her little secret: she sang. And it was with this melody that the H1 drew our attention on her fascinating inner life composed of handmade wheels, pinions, screws and plates.

With his next creation, the H2, Haldimann remained true to his leitmotif, his concern for the centre. This double tourbillon ingeniously involved two balances spinning in opposite directions around the middle of the dial. Their dance was performed in the harmonic unison with each other's resonance.

While these two creations served Haldimann to give proof of his technical genius, with his next creation he focused on his philosophical involvement with time and its inexorable progress. Lacking both hands and numerals the Haldimann H8 central tourbillon epitomised the perfect abstraction of the time's passage, embodied in an artful sculpture for the wrist.

Haldimann's pursuit of abstraction didn't end there. Driven by his inspiration he went even further and set out on a journey to the frontiers of the watch. The result was the minimalist H9, a tantalising black hole on the wrist with which he challenged our notion of the watch. While the H9 had a case and a strap and also sported a crystal and a crown, its dial was obscured. The domed sapphire crystal was coated with vaporised black colour on the inside and lured the wearer's gaze into immeasurable depths. Haldimann's central tourbillon was ticking inside, yet it couldn't be seen. It could only be fancied, believed in thanks to its distinctive melody.

The H9 allowed Beat Haldimann to reach an end point in his purist's pursuit. No doubt, the H9 is final. So what could possibly follow after this succession of increasingly quix-

otic and abstract creations? Nothing. Period. However, there is room for something new before the H9, before the H11 to be precise. So today we are looking at an enhancement on the other end of Haldimann's spectrum.

H11 – two faces of time

"Everyone can do this!". We all know this statement – whether it is tauntingly trumpeted or murmured to oneself in abashed self-doubt.



Whenever a result looks particularly easy to achieve, whenever thus a performance no longer betrays the feats and pains that came with it, we sometimes fail to appreciate the result. It is only after thoroughly pondering the achievement that we are able to guess the underlying mastery. Ultimately it's the seemingly "simple" dishes that in order to please our palates require true virtuosity, isn't it? For nothing can be hidden there and every incremental decision influences the result.

With the H11 Haldimann puts us in a similar situation. Smilingly he invites us to a "simple" menu: a watch with two hands and no complications. This almost provocative simplicity isn't just the bare consequence of a practical layout of the watch's operational elements. In fact, this simplicity is the intrinsic ideal of the H11. No other Haldimann watch – any watch really – has ever met this ideal with so much aplomb: For the first time ever for a watch with central minute and hour the H11 has the balance mounted in the centre. What's more, in contrast to conventional movements the balance wheel is not recessed into the calibre

but hovering on top of the main plate held by a cock and thus splendidly showcased to the observer.

Spinning on the central axis the balance distributes the energy over the unobstructed pallet fork to a wheel train which both in its layout and the number of parts used is of unmatched simplicity. This lucid architecture of the movement belies the technical challenges that Haldimann had to overcome to relocate the balance at the heart of the watch. As is well known, he is not easily intimidated by technical difficulties but rather embraces them. So it is only thanks to Haldimann's creative audacity that he has been able to remain true to his principles.

The purity of the Haldimann H11 is not restricted to the movement but can be found in every detail of the design: superfluous engravings on the case and plates were eschewed and the decoration adheres to the inconspicuous overall character of the watch. On the dial side, too, the H11 is simple but not prosaic. There are only two hands and they incorporate a distinctive feature: on closer inspection one discovers that the tip of the hands is designed in the shape of a heart or shovel. With this, Beat delivers on a promise he made at our first meeting. Among watch hands this shape is unique. It alludes to a Haldimann pocket watch from the 18th century as well as a Haldimann wall clock from the 17th century, both with similarly shaped hands.

In conclusion, the H11 can be seen as the counterpart of the H1. For, whereas the core of the H1 is virtually extrapolated over the dial, the





H11 hides its inner life, only to reveal on the reverse a compact microcosm clustered around the central balance. Only to the wearer himself shall this microcosm be accessible. Once he takes off the H11 to let his mind sink into the play of the central balance he will become aware of the events taking place at the lower level. There the escapement wheel, second wheel, minute wheel and hour wheel spin to the beat of the escapement.

It is hard to say which aspect is more alluring: the impulsive play of the central balance with its entourage of busy wheels or the soothing promenade of the unique hands on the elegant dial. The H11 shows us two faces of time – the measured time and the passage of time – and does so surpassing every other Haldimann watch in clarity and beauty. In order

to accentuate the equivalence of the said two faces of time the H11 holds a discreet feature: the main plate and the dial possess the exact same frosted gilt finish.

Just like the H9 represents an end point, the H11 is ultimate in its own right. Both watches are uncompromising and radical in their own ways, the H9 for its provocative contrast between the complex inner life and its unapproachable housing, the H11 for its pure construction. The H11 is a classic right from the beginning, owing its timeless beauty to its purity and functionality.

Lastly, I put the H11 back in its box and in so doing I notice that the purism is not confined to the watch itself: the H11 and the box share the same language. Built from solid walnut the box is cylindrically shaped

and with its convex walls alludes to the watchcase. The screw cap is tastefully inlaid with the Haldimann logo, handcrafted intarsia made of the same walnut wood. I am holding the warm wooden box in my hands. Its delicious fragrance reminds me of the woods around Lake Thun. Indeed, the walnut used for the box comes from the immediate surroundings of Haldimann's workshop.

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