

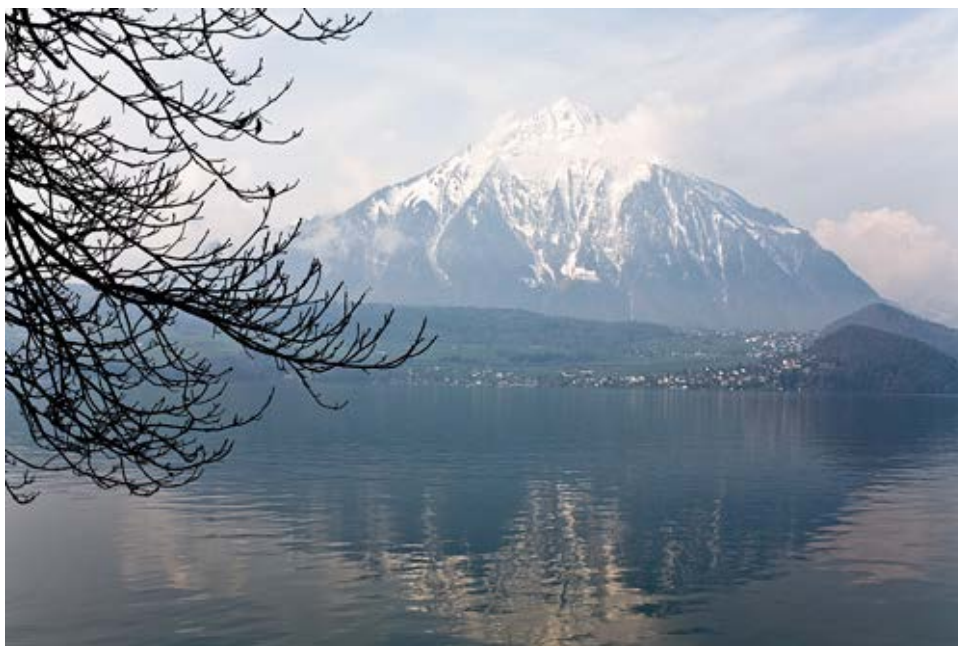
Valentin Blank, April 2008

Follow the song of the tourbillon

A visit to Beat Haldimann's workshop

The surprise

The story begins on an early Saturday morning in April. I was on my way to Interlaken to meet Harish, a watch collector friend from California. He recently purchased a Haldimann H1. So I thought I might try to arrange for a meeting with Beat Haldimann. And to our pleasure Beat immediately agreed. So, off we went to Thun where Beat's workshop is located.



Petrified calm: the Niesen

On our way we stopped over at Merligen to let the famous Niesen's grace sink into our mind. Due to its pyramid-like shape it has inspired numerous painters, with Paul Klee being probably the best known of them. What's more, the Niesen is said to have soothing effects on his admirers. As we were to find out half an hour later, the Niesen shares this quality with Beat Haldimann.

The mansion

Filled with anticipation we drove on and arrived at Beat's mansion on the dot. It was

built in 1907 in the typical turn of the century style. Being a man of great consistency, Beat accordingly furnished the whole living *and* workshop area with furniture from the German Secession period. So, wandering around those generous rooms, one immediately understands where Beat and his team draw all their patience and energy from. The workshop is a landmark of taste and harmony.



The Haldimann mansion

And in the rare case the atmosphere gets too tense, the watchmakers just have to step outside in the beautiful garden and have a walk on the infinite loop — a little path that has the shape of an '8'. What a philosophical pleasure, reminding me of Aristotle's Peripatetics. In the front garden an elegant sculpture sporadically spitted fire out of two travertine pillars. I will tell you later what this sculpture has to do with Beat's watches.



Beat Haldimann next to his garden sculpture

The workshop

Entering the workshop is like forgetting about time. The visitor is surrounded by beautiful furniture and solid engines. Nothing beeps, nothing blinks, all the engines date from the pre-digital era. Beat told us that it hasn't been easy at all to find these mechanic marvels, for they are highly sought-after among collectors. However, the good thing is that once you have got your hands on one of them you don't have to bother anymore, as these vintage engines are nearly indestructible. What's more, due to their solid construction they run for decades without compromising their precision.



Precision lathe on the parquet



One of the workshop rooms

While we were enjoying the peaceful and inspirational atmosphere, Beat explained to us that although he could save costs by using CNC machines he deliberately goes without them. Given the price range of a typical Haldimann watch or clock, the reduction of costs would be negligible. And, more importantly, the watchmaking process as well as the watches themselves would lose something of their charm. The absence of CNC requires each movement to be customised by hand so that the parts interact smoothly — just like a hundred years ago. As a consequence each Haldimann watch and clock is a *unique* piece of art.

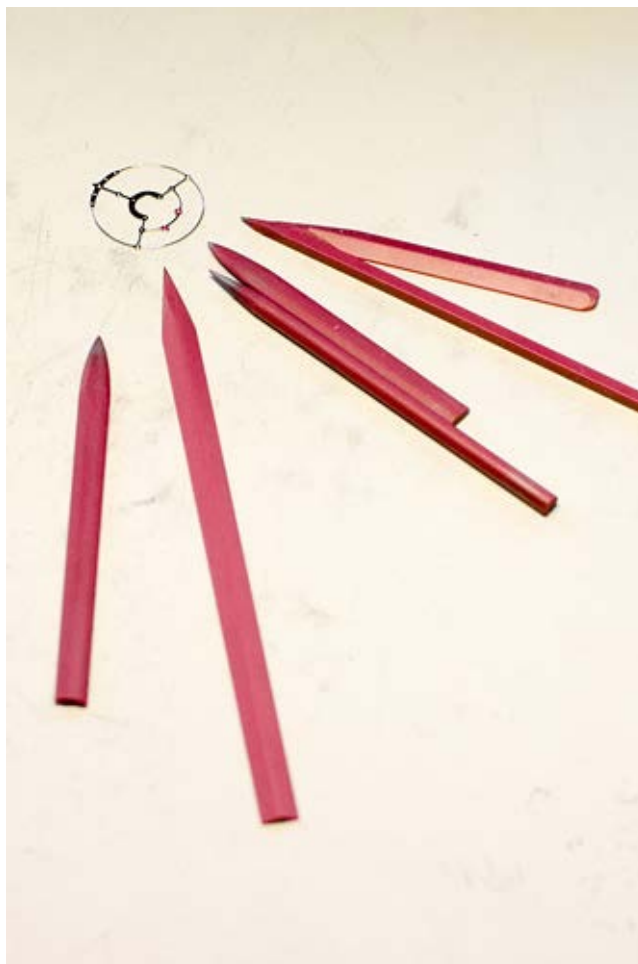


The microscope shines on a tourbillon cage for the H1



Beat explains his caliber H.ZEN-A

Everything is done by hand to a precision of a thousandth millimeter. A lot of the tools Beat and his team use for their delicate work are built by them. Those same tools are also used for the restoration of old masterpieces, an instructive task Beat attaches great importance to despite the burgeoning development of his own brand.



"Bird's tongues" used to bevel the tourbillon cage

Beat has a neat storage for all the parts used in his watches and clocks. Even they have their proper Secessionist armoire. Evidently, apart from having all parts in stock, Beat would be in a position of reproducing any part he needed, should there once be a shortage.



Where the parts are stored

The watches

Let's finally talk watches now. Have you ever seen this Haldimann in the picture below? That's right, you haven't. One day Beat got a phone call from a watchmaker colleague telling him that he had just bought a Haldimann *pocket* watch. Beat thought it's a joke. So, the colleague sent him a picture which Beat took for photoshopped. It's only when the pocket watch itself was sent to him that he was ready to believe it: an early namesake of him was a master watchmaker as Beat immediately discovered after taking a look at the movement. By the way, there is a detail in the design of this pocket watch that inspired Beat so much that he has planned to use it in his next creations. I leave it up to him to reveal which detail it is.



No joke: the 'Haldimann' pocket watch

Since that first find Beat has tracked down a couple more Haldimann pocket watches. One of the finest pieces sports a dead second and little jumping seconds. Beat has decided to leave the movement completely untouched as he wanted to preserve it as a proof of the excellence and refinement achieved back then. The movement finish is indeed exquisite.



Antique 'Haldimann' pocket watch with dead second



... and an exquisite inner life

Let's step into the present now and take a close look at *our* Haldimann's creations. Remember that garden sculpture I mentioned at the beginning of this article? The flames that are spat out of the two pillars interact with each other: the flame coming out of one of the towers provokes the other pillar to produce a flame as well. The whole magic is based on the principle of resonance. And resonance is also one of the leitmotifs in Beat's watchmaking. One of the most impressive embodiments of this phenomenon is the celebrated Haldimann H2.



Two flying tourbillons for your head: the ingenious H2

At a closer look we can make out the whole ingenuity of this mechanism. The escape wheels of this double tourbillon stimulate each other and will fall into a similar oscillation pattern shortly after having been set in motion. The reason for this to happen is the resonance which is transmitted between the two wheels by an interconnection of the balance-spring studs, linked by the common resonance spring. The latter can be seen prominently in the picture below. Furthermore you can see the Breguet overcoils of which in order to assist the common resonance the outer curve has been altered. To see this sophisticated mechanism in action is truly captivating. And it has to be noted that despite the complexity of this movement the H2 doesn't exceed Haldimann's preferred case dimensions, that is a diameter of 39 mm and 10 mm in height. If the principle of resonance appeals to you, then do take a look at Beat's marvelous resonance pendulum clock H101 as well.



Can you hear it ticking?

To put it in Beat's words: while the Haldimann H2 is for the head, the H1 is for the heart. It is indeed impossible to escape the charm of this huge central tourbillon — the biggest tourbillon ever used in a wristwatch of this size. Every tick looks like an elegant move of a muse. And this muse has a voice, too: while it was a common phenomenon for the tourbillon in a pocket watch to 'sing', the much smaller wristwatches no longer have a melody, they simply tick. So, Beat wanted to bring the song to his wristwatch creations too. By using so large and strong a tourbillon, he achieved this. Hold the H1 to your ear and it will turn your legs to jelly. This song is divine. What an intimate pleasure!



A tourbillon for your heart: the singing H1

It goes without saying that the H1, too, has the classic Haldimann case dimensions. Nevertheless, the tourbillon has an impressive diameter of 16.8 mm. The balance measures 14.14 mm in diameter. Probably better than any other Haldimann creation to date, the H1 epitomises Beat's (I dare say) philosophical approach to watchmaking. His aim is to enchant and captivate the admirers with the movement. Only after enjoying the cathartic and soothing motion of that revolving sculpture in the heart of the watch shall we read the time — if we really need to. And if you ever pondered the beauty of a Haldimann watch you know that the second step is indeed optional.



It's impossible to get your eyes off the H1

Closing words

Those few who are fortunate enough to buy a Haldimann watch shouldn't miss the opportunity to collect their watch personally and combine the magic moment with a call on Beat. His preferred place to hand over his watches and clocks to their future owners is the library. It contains a huge collection of watchmaking-related literature and makes for a dedicated environment to celebrate this landmark in the life of every watch collector.



Where the sought-after Haldimann watches are handed over to their lucky owners: Beat's library

Long after bidding goodbye to Beat the song of his fabulous tourbillon was still right there in my head and blended seamlessly with the dear memories of this visit. I was truly impressed by the consistency in Beat's approach. The way he thinks, speaks, the way he has furnished his workshop and the concept that lays beneath each of his creations, just everything that has to do with this man seems to be part of the same essence. It can be said without exaggeration that Beat lives to his (noble) ideals. We were blessed to partake in these ideals that April morning.

Thank you, Beat.

If you enjoyed this report you may also want to read the article about [Beat Haldimann's H8](#).