

Michel Parmigiani, Master watchmaker and restorer

Michel Parmigiani was born on 2 December 1950 in Couvet, in the Canton of Neuchâtel. When it came to choosing his future career, he was torn. Would he become a watchmaker or an architect? Both disciplines combine creative and technical aspects. But watchmaking involves an element of mystery which attracted him as a young man. He decided to become a watchmaker. And he didn't stop there. He added to his formal watchmaking training by specialising in watch construction – the preserve of the watchmaking profession's elite.

1976. The quartz watch crisis was ravaging the watchmaking industry. Michel Parmigiani launched his career against all odds. He opened an independent workshop focusing on restoring antique *objets d'art*, driven by a deep conviction: "*When one has had the chance to work on as many wonders of the past as I have done, it was simply impossible to believe that traditional watchmaking would die out*" he said, years later.

Michel Parmigiani found his in-depth restoration work gave him the confidence he needed to pursue his watchmaking dreams, despite the naysayers. Using his methodology, he built a real work ethic, honing his skills using the gems of knowledge he gleaned from every work of the past he analysed, learning how to best bring these back to life. Soon museums and collectors sought out his talents. In the 1980s, he was entrusted with the maintenance of the Maurice-Yves Sandoz collection. It was in this capacity that he had a decisive encounter with Nicole Landolt-Sandoz and her son Pierre Landolt, president of the Sandoz Family Foundation. Their respect and admiration for him would sow the seeds for the incredible watchmaking adventure upon which he embarked. Michel Parmigiani acquired the production means and resources to create a brand that would bear his own name. On 29 May 1996, Parmigiani Fleurier was officially launched under its first name, "Parmigiani Measure et Art du Temps".

Key milestones in the life of Michel Parmigiani

- 2 December 1950.** Michel Parmigiani is born in Couvet (Switzerland) in Val-de-Travers, in the canton of Neuchâtel.
- 1963.** Michel Parmigiani undertakes a project about an extraordinary character in the region – Albert Bernet – the last farmer/watchmaker; the piece was submitted for a competition as part of the 1964 Swiss National Exhibition in Lausanne.
- 1966–1969.** Michel Parmigiani decides to follow a course of training to become a practising watchmaker at the Fleurier school of watchmaking.
- 1969–1971.** He extends his knowledge with further full watchmaking training at the La Chaux-de-Fonds Technicum, followed by two years in the micromechanical construction department at the Le Locle Technicum.
- 1973–1975.** He becomes Technical assistant to the management at Juvenia.
- 1975.** Expert member of the commission of the "L'Institut l'Homme et le Temps" at the International Museum of Horology (MIH) concerned with establishing training in timepiece restoration.
- 1976.** Michel Parmigiani embarks on his solo career. He establishes his first workshop in Couvet.
- 1976.** Restoration of exceptional antique timepieces on behalf of Dr. Eugène Gschwind, an important collector from Basel, who had connections with various connoisseurs, collectors and museums, including the Kirschgarten Museum in Basel and The Time Museum in Rockford, Illinois (USA). This collaboration continued until 1990.
- 1976.** First meeting with watchmaking engineer and artist, Marcel JeanRichard, the creator of the astronomical clocks adorning the entrance of Gübelin boutiques. He shared his great expertise with Michel Parmigiani with a view to finishing incomplete timepieces.
- 1977.** Creation of various unique pieces, pocket tourbillons, table clocks, watchmaking *objets d'art*, complication watches for Breguet, Comor, Piaget, Tiffany, and Vacheron Constantin. This collaboration continued until 2002.
- 1978.** Michel Parmigiani employs his first member of staff – Charles Meylan – a watchmaker with experience in complication watches and the last student at the school of watchmaking in the Vallée de Joux to have created a pocket watch with a minute repeater.
- 1979.** Support from an American collector – Jacques-François Kocmanek – who worked as a staff scientist in the laboratory at the Carnegie Institution of Washington, USA.
- 1980.** Michel Parmigiani becomes the official restorer of the Sandoz Family Foundation's collection of watchmaking *objets d'art*, appointed by Nicole Landolt-Sandoz on the recommendation of Ephrem Jobin, Curator of the Watchmaking Museum in Le Locle.
- 1983–1984.** Replacement as technical design teacher at the school of watchmaking in Fleurier.
- 1985.** Development of an ultra-thin perpetual calendar for a pocket watch.
- 1987.** Meeting with Pierre Landolt to explain to him the essentials and the art of mechanical watchmaking. This wealth of watchmaking expertise was threatened with extinction as a result of the commoditisation of traditional craft techniques.
- 1988.** Development of a table clock made from rock crystal, designed for the King of Morocco; the clock featured a constant-force instantaneous perpetual calendar, a power reserve of 8 days, and a large central seconds hand.
- 1989.** Development of a perpetual calendar for a carriage or table clock.

- 1990.** Founding of the Parmigiani Measure et Art du Temps company in Fleurier.
- 1990.** Production of the Calibre 90, an automatic pocket watch and its various versions designed for the Breguet firm.
- 1990.** Creation of an astronomical pocket watch model indicating the true solar time.
- 1990.** Michel Parmigiani launches a fundraising campaign to enable the "Astrarium of Giovanni Dondi dell'Orologio" to be donated to the International Museum of Horology (MIH). This project is supported by itinerant conferences speaking about Dondi's work and Luigi Pippa's restoration of the clock.
- 1990.** Revival of the historic brand Bovet in Fleurier to promote niche expertise relating to the Chinese market.
- 1991.** Michel Parmigiani and his restoration workshop breathe new life into the "Pendule Sympathique" clock by Breguet, currently owned by the Patek Philippe Museum. This clock was deemed to be beyond restoration.
- 1993.** Invention of the concept of a perpetual lunar calendar and corresponding patent filed.
- 1994.** Creation of an Haute Joaillerie grand complication pocket watch for Piaget's jubilee (1874-1994).
- 1994.** Development of an automatic movement for Chopard and help provided to establish them in Fleurier.
- 1994.** Start of construction of Parmigiani Fleurier's double-barrel self-winding calibre.
- 21 March 1995.** Michel Parmigiani receives the GAIA award for his entrepreneurship as a craftsman.
- 1995.** The company employs a staff of 55, the driving force behind the creation of the Parmigiani Fleurier collection when the brand was launched.
- 1995.** Collaboration with Anthony Randall to create the crystal cylindrical balance-spring applied to a table clock, countering the issues caused by the magnetism affecting the precision of the regulating organ.
- 1996.** The Sandoz Family Foundation acquires Parmigiani Measure et Art du Temps SA, led by Foundation president, Pierre Landolt.
- 29 May 1996.** The Parmigiani Fleurier brand is launched at the Beau-Rivage Palace in Lausanne, with a stunning collection of 52 simple and complicated pieces including the "Fleur d'Orient" table clock, surrounded by several key examples of restored timepieces – from the Renaissance watch to the "Pendule Sympathique" clock.
- 1998.** Creation of a table clock with six faces, with a cabinet made from precious metal, designed for Piaget.
- 1998.** Creation of a watchmaking *objet d'art* made from gold and precious and semi-precious stones, featuring a skeletonised movement with an 8-day power reserve.
- 1998.** Michel Parmigiani and his team restore the Planetarium clock by François Ducommun. This clock is exhibited at Milan's Sforza Castle.
- 1998.** Restoration of the Breguet portico clock, an exceptional clock commissioned by Princess Mathilde Bonaparte for her husband, Prince Anatole Demidov. The clock forms part of the collections at the Paris Museum of Decorative Arts.
- 1999.** Construction of a tonneau-shaped movement, the 110 calibre with its 8-day power reserve, that powered the ancestor of the Kalpa collection.

- 1999.** Creation of a perfume spray gun made from precious metal, featuring enamelling and set with jewels. This piece is presented in an exquisite case representing the palace of the Sultan of Oman.
- 2002.** Michel Parmigiani establishes the Fleurier Quality Certification with Karl-Friedrich Scheufele.
- 2004.** Launch of the first timepiece to receive Fleurier Quality Certification – the Tonda Qualité Fleurier.
- 2004.** Creation of a tonneau-shaped 30-second tourbillon with an 8-day power reserve and central seconds hand.
- 2004.** Unveiling of the Bugatti Type 370, a world first, equipped with a tubular movement assembled on a transverse axis.
- 2009.** Launch of the Fibonacci pocket watch representing the quest for the harmony embodied by the golden ratio. This timepiece was the fruit of a collaboration of many experts and specialists.
- 2010.** Contribution to the "Mirror of Seduction" exhibition at the Patek Philippe Museum.
- 2010.** The first table clock with a Hijiri perpetual lunar calendar is presented at a world première for the Middle Eastern press.
- 2011.** Launch of the Tonda 1950 collection, in reference to Michel Parmigiani's date of birth. This classic timepiece, with its ultra-thin form and understated design, highlights the brand's aesthetic codes. This is the manufacture's first automatic movement with micro-rotor.
- 2012.** Michel Parmigiani is made an honorary citizen of the municipality of Val-de-Travers in recognition of his work to relaunch watchmaking in the region.
- 2014.** Awarded the title of "Approved Restorer" by the Patek Philippe Museum.
- 2014.** Launch of the study of a chiming wristwatch with 4 hammers and an upside-down movement. Inspired by the watch made by Perrin Frères, from the Maurice-Yves Sandoz Collection, to showcase the beauty of the timepiece's inner workings.
- 2015.** Launch of a study of an ultra-complicated table clock with passing strike chime and on-demand minute repeater, along with astronomical indications and an alarm.
- 2016.** Development of a new design for a singing bird automaton.

To present: Michel Parmigiani upholds Parmigiani Fleurier's codes and the oversees the brand's special projects, guaranteeing its creative force and its long-term success.