

THE STORY OF L'Épée 1839 clocks encompasses both tradition and radical change. It's a story of how those two apparently incompatible positions can work in perfect harmony. The company was founded by Auguste L'Épée in France in 1839. Inside two decades, it was applying for patents, indicating its commitment to both high-quality manufacture and technical innovation. And yet this was never enough. From winning a succession of gold medals at World Fairs at the turn of the 20th century through to fitting wall clocks on the first commercial flights of Concorde in the 1970s, the company has always stood out from the competition.

L'Épée 1839 has achieved state-of-the-art excellence by constantly being restless and adventurous. For CEO Arnaud Nicolas, the company's philosophy is expressed through its range of products. "We have three lines," he says. "Carriage clocks, which are formal; the Technical line, where the mechanical movement is highlighted by a minimalist housing; and, finally, the Creative line, which is about fantasy and having fun while also respecting the DNA of the company."

The firm's carriage clocks are as faithfully classical in design as any traditionalist could want. And yet the whole L'Épée 1839 range sets itself a unique and difficult challenge that makes huge demands of the artisans who design and assemble the clocks. "We have to embed a specific movement, or mechanism," says Arnaud. "It's not like in most watches, or indeed cars, where you have a movement – or an engine – and you place a housing around it. In each one of our pieces, the movement is part of the housing and the housing is part of the movement. To continue the car

analogy, it would be like if part of the engine was used as part of the body of the car. So the same engineers have to be able to do both. They are inseparable."

To this end, and to ensure that standards are maintained, the company also manufactures the vast majority of the components used. For example, the company's Balthazar clock contains 635 components, of which only three are not manufactured by L'Épée itself. "It's not something we chose," says Arnaud. "We had to do it because we were unable to find suppliers who were able to reach our quality standards."

This ambitious and intricate process is fully realised in the company's Creative range. Here, L'Épée's designers are given the freedom to unleash their considerable imaginations. This starts at the top of the company – Arnaud is the CEO but also the Creative Director – and there's a strong sense that these timepieces are labours of love. "We always have a twist of humour," he says. "We are all children really. My wife is always telling me that I am the third kid in the house and she's probably right! I like the Max Busser saying that 'A creative adult is a child who has survived'."

From the Vanitas timepiece (in which the mechanism is incorporated into a skull that seems to make a darkly witty comment on the transient nature of time itself) to the remarkable, eight-legged Arachnophobia clock, these are unique pieces. They are a perfect marriage of form and function and are designed as such. "People who buy our clocks right now are not people buying a clock," explains Arnaud. "They are buying a piece of art that keeps time." www.lepee1839.ch

ALL TIME GREATS

For 180 years L'Épée 1839 hasn't just been making clocks – it has made pieces of high art that tell the time



