

THREE'S COMPANY



Greubel Forsey CEO
EMMANUEL VUILLE
shares his excitement and thoughts on working with the company's pioneering founders and his vision for the exclusive high-end watch brand

BY IAN SKELLERN

Since the launch of Greubel Forsey in 2004, Robert Greubel and Stephen Forsey have dominated a niche at the ultra-high end of horology. The exclusive brand has been such a phenomenal success that most of their watches are sold even before they reach the boutiques.

In January 2009, the brand's founders announced the appointment of industry veteran Emmanuel Vuille as CEO of Greubel Forsey, thus allowing them to focus on developing new inventions and timepieces. REV★LUTION meets up with Mr Vuille to find out more about his plans to enhance Greubel Forsey's product presence and maintain its exclusiveness, and at the same time, lead the brand to greater horological heights.

Tell us a bit about yourself and the milestones in your life.

I am 50 years old this year and I grew up in La Sagne — a small village not far from La Chaux-de-Fonds. I studied finance and began my professional life in banking. Then one day, when I was around 30, a few of my clients who were involved in watchmaking asked if I would like to work with them as a business and financial manager. So, I seized the opportunity to set up my own financial consultancy. I first met Michel Parmigiani as a business and financial consultant. I was already working with Michel when the Sandoz Family Foundation decided to develop a

brand with him — at that time, it was “Parmigiani Measure et Art du Temps” — and they asked if I would like to join them. I saw it as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and that was when I entered the world of watchmaking. That was around 18 years ago.

What was your initial position with Parmigiani?

I was the CEO and Michel was the chairman. My role was to run the company and allow Michel time to develop the timepieces. Michel and I then launched Parmigiani Fleurier, and at the same time, developed a production capacity that allowed us to create our own components, cases and dials.

At first, I was responsible for the overall business. In 2003, we separated the brand Parmigiani Fleurier from the development and production. I then took responsibility for the manufacturing arm, Vaucher, while remaining on the board of Parmigiani.

Why did you leave Vaucher?

My years with Parmigiani and Vaucher were extraordinary. But it became clear to me in 2008 that the direction I wanted to take Vaucher in was diverging from that of the Sandoz Family Foundation, so I chose to leave.

When I left Vaucher, I wasn't in any hurry to begin a new job and I planned to take a few months off. I often met up with Robert during that time. Then one day, he proposed that I join him as the CEO of Greubel Forsey, CompliTime and CT Time.

How did you meet Robert Greubel and Stephen Forsey, and did you ever think Robert would propose that you join them?

Robert has been a friend since CompliTime was founded in 2001. CompliTime has developed complications for both Parmigiani Fleurier and Vaucher.

Ever since Robert and I have known each other, we always knew that we would like to do something together. I was looking for a position where I could work with people whom I liked and respected, have a certain freedom to develop my plans, and work in an environment where decisions could be made quickly. Most importantly, I must be able to derive pleasure from my work. Being the CEO of Greubel Forsey offered me all that and more.

It had been 10 years since I separated from Parmigiani Fleurier to work entirely in production, and the thought of working with a watch brand again appealed to me. As we spoke, it became clear that both Robert and I shared similar objectives for the future. I took some time to think it over, but I didn't need too long to say “yes”. That was around September or October 2008.

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Greubel Forsey's Double Tourbillon 30° is Emmanuel Vuille's favorite of the brand's collection — 'It's refined, classy, and only the owner knows how good it really is,' reveals the persuasive new CEO

“I suggested entering the 2009 Concours International de Chronométrie competition organized by the Watchmaking Museum in Le Locle — if you promote yourself as crafters of precision movements, then you are obliged to prove it”



How are the company responsibilities shared among Robert, Stephen and yourself?

The structure Robert and Stephen had in place for the Greubel Forsey companies worked very well, but it had reached its limit as the companies grew [three companies and around 100 people].

Apart from the need for a new management structure, Robert and Stephen wanted to go back to focusing on what they love — inventing and developing new complications — rather than spend more time managing their growing companies.

So, we have put together a structure where Robert, Stephen and I decide the strategy of the business. Robert is now like a chairman and I am the CEO. We have CT Time, which we plan to grow; CompliTime as the production facility; and Greubel Forsey, the jewel in the crown. Greubel Forsey will remain as a niche, ultra-high-end brand crafting low numbers of very exclusive complicated timepieces.

Are we likely to see you as the face of Greubel Forsey?

No, that is neither my role nor my intention. My job is to keep the wheels turning smoothly so Robert and Stephen can devote more time to developing exciting timepieces for Greubel Forsey.

What future changes can we expect to see at Greubel Forsey?

Well, one of the issues stems from Greubel Forsey’s exclusivity: it is difficult for potential clients to see one of our watches. They are usually sold before they arrive at one of our boutique partners, so they are never on display. We are looking at how we can preserve this exclusivity, but to balance it with letting people know we exist.

What about the direction of future complications?

The tourbillon will continue to be at the heart of future Greubel Forsey timepieces — we are confident that our tourbillons improve timekeeping. We are also working on other new complications. I would like to open up more ways to let the world know how good the timekeeping of our timepieces is, which was why I suggested entering the 2009 Concours International de Chronométrie competition organized by the Watchmaking Museum in Le Locle. Of course, there is the risk of not winning. But if you promote yourself as crafters of precision movements, you are obliged to prove it. Even if we don’t win, we — and our clients — can be very proud that we had the confidence in our timepieces to have entered.

How would you sum up your experience at Greubel Forsey?

The team is very talented, and we have a shared vision of the future. I am excited to have this opportunity to lead Robert and Stephen’s company into the future. ★

Greubel Forsey’s Quadruple Tourbillon features four fascinating asynchronous tourbillons that are linked by a spherical differential. The timepiece is available in both platinum and pink gold