



## RACING WATCHES

PRODUCT DESIGNER AND ENTREPRENEUR GIULIANO MAZZUOLI HAS TURNED HIS HAND TO MAKING WATCHES WITH A STAMP OF ORIGINALITY, INSPIRED BY HIS ALFA ROMEO RACING DAYS.

BY CLAIRE ADLER

**F**lorentine designer, former racing driver and now maverick watchmaker, Giuliano Mazzuoli, seems to be something of an expert at career changing. But with his relaxed Italian style, white designer stubble and hip Costume National trainers, he's taking it all in his stride.

A purist with an innate passion for design, Mazzuoli claims he is a creator of beautiful and original objects rather than a businessman – as presumably only a former racing driver can afford to be.

In the library of the Knightsbridge Hotel, Mazzuoli and his fresh faced son Emiliano show me the newest collection of Contagiri watches. Mazzuoli's first watch, the Manometro, resembled the pressure gages found in racing cars. The Manometro was one of the first watches in the world to sport a case made entirely of carbon fibre. Now his newest offering, the Contagiri, in titanium carbon fibre and gold carbon fibre combinations, recalls the rev counter of the new 150,300 euro limited edition Alfa Romeo Super Car. Even the watch's crafted leather box echoes its bonnet and seats.

With clean good looks, only one hand to tell the time, nifty mechanisms sure to be loved by gizmo junkies and three international patents, the Contagiri spins the traditional method of reading the time on its head.

Over three years in the making, there's not a pusher or a crown in sight. A lever built into the side of the watch which you pull out with a fingernail and pull again, sets the watch into gear, allowing you to change the time. The retrograde dial in the form of an incomplete circle, means the watch's only hand jumps back at 12 o'clock to zero at an accelerated speed.

Mazzuoli's link-up with the Supercar came about when Mazzuoli spotted Alfa Romeo boss, Lapo Elkann, on Italian TV wearing one of his watches. He contacted him and they soon started collaborating on the Contagiri project.

"When I raced Alfa Romeos in the seventies, the rev counter in the Alfa Romeo GT evoked the most powerful emotions in me," says Mazzuoli. "I think people will always appreciate simplicity because simplicity is the most difficult element in design."

The night after our meeting, the official Contagiri launch at Fulham restaurant Bibendum sees the venue fronted by a shining red Alfa Romeo Super Car and torch flames to welcome guests. Inside, journalists and loyal male and female customers - one is passing through London specially for the party on the way back to New York from the Cannes Film Festival - and high profile football agent Kia Joorabchian, all mingle in the company of a performance artist interpreting Mazzuoli's designs on paper, using a modest piece of charcoal.

For all the media blitz and overt display of Mazzuoli's talent, this watchmaker is a rather freethinking fellow who doesn't necessarily dream of wooing the masses. When he first went to New York to try and sell the quirky notebooks he had designed - with a choice of wavy or oblique lines instead of straight ones - it was not long before he had a choice to make. The shop at the Museum of Modern Art wanted 10,000 of them and an American department store was about to place an order for 100,000.

"Everyone started laughing when they saw those notebooks. I think they made the saddest people in the world smile," recalls Mazzuoli.

Still in New York, he excitedly phoned his wife saying: "The MOMA wants 10,000," ignoring the mass market opportunity for his designs, instead embracing the excitement and prestige associated with exclusivity.

*"I think people will always appreciate simplicity because simplicity is the most difficult element in design."*

GIULIANO MAZZUOLI



This is typical Mazzuoli. "The Giuliano Mazzuoli brand could be 50 times more successful than it is," maintains Giuseppe Ferro, London based fellow Italian and Mazzuoli's UK distributor. "After four years of the Giuliano Mazzuoli watches, we have 12 retailers in Italy and we have turned down 25. In the UK, we have under 10. We are proud to have the watches sitting alongside the very best brands in the watch business - at Pisa Orologeria in Milan, Hausmann in Rome, Cellini in New York, Chronopassion in Paris and the Watch Gallery in London's Fulham. I think the design's simplicity has been the appeal of the watches in an overcrowded market"

That Mazzuoli has taken to designing watches seems almost incidental. Admittedly, his ancestors made clocks in the Chianti area of Tuscany and even designed the clock tower in the village where Mazzuoli still lives today, and he surely developed a sensibility towards mechanics at his first job in his grandfather's bicycle shop.

PAGE 61: GIULIANO MAZZUOLI

PAGE 62:

ABOVE: STAINLESS STEEL CONTAGIRI, LIMITED EDITION OF 999 PIECES, £13,500

LEFT: GIULIANO MAZZUOLI'S MANOMETRO S IN CARBON FIBRE, £2,750



GIULIANO MAZZUOLI'S MOKA PEN EXHIBITED AT NEW YORK'S MUSEUM OF MODERN ART AND INSPIRED BY A COFFEE MACHINE

But it's Mazzuoli's fun-loving pen in the form of a coffee maker that can be found in the display cases at New York's Museum of Modern Art. The other pens he has made are all inspired by workshop tools. Mazzuoli is more a collector of cars than watches - he has eight Alfa Romeos dating from 1967 to 1972 - and he makes a point of avoiding watch magazines for fear of being influenced by other designs.

"My love for watches started relatively recently, it wasn't part of my youth," he says. "But our family paper business was focussed on printing and advertising other people's products. It made me want to create my own product. The most difficult thing about making a watch was to come up with something that was not just another copy of what was out there already. I wanted something with a strong, unique personality."

So how does a person with no background in watches make a fashionable entrance into the Swiss watch world? "Luckily I didn't know much about watches when I began because this might have inhibited my ambition. Most Swiss professionals I met with at the start told me I was crazy. But if I hadn't approached the subject with naïveté, my watches would never have made it onto the market." 🍷