

Ahead of His Time

Artist-designer JAIME HAYON is best known for his eccentric take on home products, so why is he venturing into the conservative world of watches?

OLIVER GILES finds out

SPANISH DESIGNER JAIME HAYON has never been one to take himself too seriously. After all, this is the man who appeared on the cover of the *Financial Times*' terribly proper *How To Spend It* magazine dressed like a clown, complete with an extravagantly ruched purple shirt and lipstick-drawn smile. A quick look through other press clippings also reveals his unabashed love for brightly coloured shoes, patterned

shirts and checked trousers. You get the feeling that Jaime Hayon would be uncomfortable in a suit.

It's this unbounded exuberance that has made him such a sought-after designer, as he has the energy to bounce from a commission to construct ceramic lamps to a project where he's in charge of designing a whole restaurant without stopping for breath. Yet, despite the huge variety of his previous work, it was a surprise to hear that Hayon had partnered with Ian Lowe and Angela Adams to found a Swiss watch brand,





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Orolog, and that he would soon be releasing the brand’s first watch, the OC-1 Chronograph.

Although Hayon’s skill was never in doubt, the combination of his larger-than-life personality with the normally staid world of watches did initially seem unlikely. Nevertheless, fresh from the Hong Kong launch of the OC-1 Chronograph at Lane Crawford ifc, Hayon took time out to explain his unique perspective on the world of watches and to reveal the surprising fact that Orolog is actually the realisation of a long-held dream.

WHEN DID YOU REALISE THAT YOU WANTED TO BE A DESIGNER?

I think that when I was small, I always wanted to make something creative. I was always really curious. Therefore I understood that maybe I wasn’t going to be an economist.

WHAT DREW YOU TO WATCHES?

Well, it was actually an accident. I was designing a watch for somebody else before and I experienced a little bit of what [the watch world] was about. I was never completely in love, though. I liked very much a

few models that I saw over the last few years and I was always in this sort of dream that if ever the opportunity [to design a watch] would become a reality, I would do something really special. Then the opportunity came through Ian Lowe. We met at dinner at my house in London and we started to speak about the possibility of making this happen. We discussed the details a lot and what was possible and how things could be very, very special.

HOW WAS DESIGNING A WATCH DIFFERENT FROM YOUR OTHER WORK?

To me, the main difference is that this is micro-design. You’re living in this small world in which everything needs to match perfectly, and I think that’s why it’s complicated. This micro-detailing, it goes with millimetres and not with centimetres or metres.

WHAT ARE THE KEY DESIGN FEATURES OF THE OC1 CHRONOGRAPH?

Well, there are a lot of things about the watch. The first thing is that it’s very simple. There is this simplicity and this sort of minimalistic elegance. It’s very, very subtle. We tried to make everything very refined, very rounded

and smooth. The way the box is done – it’s beautifully shiny. This idea of having a texturised crown was interesting, in contrast to the buttons that are a little bit more ’30s based. The texture [of the dial], I’ve used it before for companies like Baccarat and BD Barcelona Design. So by combining these different elements with good materials such as copper, stainless steel or good leathers – the whole design became something harmonic. It’s a watch that’s designed by a designer and not a watch that’s made by a fashion person or a watch designer, so we have a different point of view.

AFTER THE DESIGN CAPITALS OF LONDON AND PARIS, HONG KONG WAS THE THIRD CITY WHERE YOU LAUNCHED OROLOG. ARE ASIAN CITIES INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT IN THE DESIGN WORLD?

I think they are. We [in Europe] had the Bauhaus, then we had modernist movements and a lot of things were going on that were different from what was happening in Asian cities. There’s an incredible creativity and a lot of things happening in Asian countries. I truly think that

Asia is one of the most inspiring places. There are incredible cities: Singapore, Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong. To me they all have so much to say and they’re definitely a platform for me to learn.

YOU’VE BEEN REGULARLY COMPARED TO SALVADOR DALÍ AND PEDRO ALMODÓVAR. DO SUCH COMPARISONS ANNOY YOU?

They always compare you when they don’t know what you are. Now they’re starting to compare other people to me. I think it has to do with maturity, when people start to understand who you are and what you do. Yes, I’ve been compared because my work is in between the art and the design worlds. I’m Spanish; there haven’t been a lot of people influencing the design or art world from my country. People compare you and, for me, it’s only something that I can take as a good comment. Let’s see what happens; maybe in a few years they’ll say there’s Almodóvar and Dalí and also Hayon. I think this is starting to happen, which makes me really happy.

WHAT OTHER PROJECTS ARE YOU WORKING ON?

At the moment there are a lot of things happening, I’m actually going from design to art to interiors quite a lot. Lately I designed this very beautiful jewellery store in India [the Nirav Modi boutique in New Delhi], which has just opened. There are also some challenging designs for very important companies such as Cassina and Fritz Hansen, which are coming up. Most important is that I still continue to enjoy very, very much going around and doing new projects. I think this year will be interesting for me, as I will put on the market a few new pieces of design that will challenge the work I’m doing. I’m always trying to look for these kinds of challenges that will bring forward whatever I do. ■

IS HE OFF HIS ROCKER?

Orolog might be Hayon’s most conservative project in years. Here are three of his wackier designs



GREEN CHICKEN

Only Hayon could get away with reimagining the traditional rocking horse as a fluorescent green chicken. This quirky piece won him fans around the world and quickly came to exemplify his humorous approach. Hayon has said that he “wanted to portray this common bird as a sensational object” and, judging from the reaction, he certainly succeeded.



SUPERSONIC PIG

Do you see the connection between Supersonic Pig and bathroom design? Neither do we, yet the pig strangely won Hayon his first design commission for exactly that. Although grateful for this career-starter, even Hayon has admitted that loo design was a “weird” job to get off the back of the sculpture.



THE GUEST – LLADRÓ COLLABORATION

Lladró is famous for its delicate porcelain figurines, so a few traditionalist noses were put out of joint when the brand announced its collaboration with Hayon. As expected, Hayon’s outlandish characters were a rather sharp change from Lladró’s conventional designs.

THE OC CHRONOGRAPH IN A MATT BLACK CASE LEFT AND A RED GOLD PVD CASE