Designing my own watch

Timeless timepiece, both functional and comfortable

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Nov. 30, 2020

Last month a very special package arrived from Switzerland, containing my custom made wrist watch. I decided to sell all my big brand watches and have them replaced by something unique, tailored to my personal preferences. This is the story of my watch.

Watches

There is something magical in these miniature machines that sit on peoples' wrists: watches. They are technical marvels that often are much more than mere tools to tell time.

Some are status symbols, some are pieces of art, some are fitness tools and others are digital companions. But most of all, a watch is something truly personal: you wear it on

your body. With smartphones and computers everywhere, nobody really needs a watch to tell time. Wearing a watch is a deliberate choice, one I like to carefully consider.

Some of my watches over the years

Over the years I have worn many different watches and each of them has its own story and reason. Yet none of them felt like a perfect fit *for me.*

You'll be surprised how hard it is to *precisely* define what you *really* want. I took my time (pun intended) to distill a list of features that would define *my perfect watch*:

- **analogue display:** like the natural passing of time I like the hands of a watch to sweep by as time progresses
- **simple:** devoid of any unnecessary distractions I like my watch to be (visually) focussed on its function
- **autonomous:** in line with how I value my own independence, I like my watch to be capable of running all by itself, without the need to charge or wind it manually
- **waterproof:** as I don't fear rain while riding my bike and as I do like to swim, my watch should be capable of dealing with water, too!
- **day and night:** with a young kid, the distinction between night and day becomes fuzzy every now and then.., any bearing the watch can provide in total darkness is welcome!
- **timeless:** in a world where things become obsolete rapidly, I love to think of my watch as something more timeless, like a piece of art

- **inconspicuous:** I wear my watch for myself, I don't want it to attract any unnecessary attention
- **honest:** it should be true to the nature of the material, I don't like to hide things behind layers of superficial markup

ochs und junior

Then I stumbled upon ochs und junior, a small watch company from Switzerland. Founded in 2006 by Ludwig Oechslin, Beat Weinmann and Kurt König, they undertook an intense construction and design process to create their watches. While the company is in a state of transformation at the moment, they're still producing the watches that earned them their reputation.

Ludwig Oechslin is obsessed with reducing the number of parts - he is described as a living legend

Their wrist watches use fewer parts to deliver mechanical complications, displaying other things than just the time. The watches are designed by Ludwig Oechslin, a renowned, recognised and awarded watchmaker, inventor and designer. He got widely known for his restoration of the astronomical clock in the Vatican Library, known as the Farnese Clock, and for the time he spent as Director of the International Museum of Horology in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland. He is obsessed with reducing the number of parts because simpler mechanics are more reliable and easier to manufacture and service.

This focus on removing unnecessary complexity is something that I totally value. It is something that I try to attain in everything I do, design and work with. Like my coffee button or my road bike. I knew immediately that this was the company that would be able to build my watch.

After contacting the company, we had several phone calls and email exchanges to discuss my ideas. Over the years they have made some very spectacular examples, yet I wanted to stay true to my wish list. When the sky is the limit, it's hard to stay on the ground - yet that's what I tried to do when creating this understated piece of art.
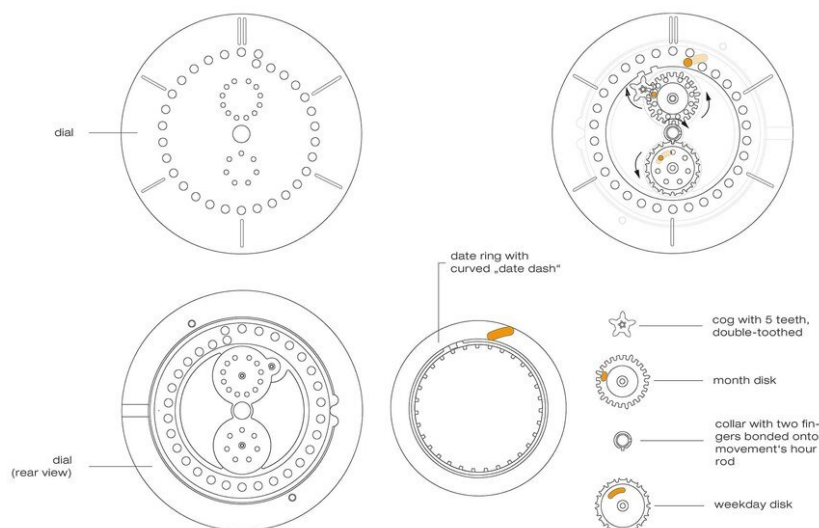
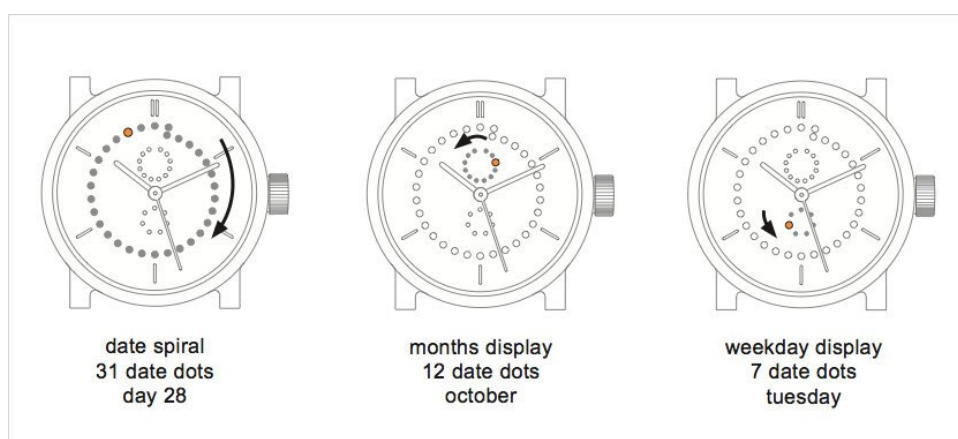*Timeless timepiece: an annual calendar watch, custom made to my specifications*

My watch is made from titanium (which is light and durable), it's small (36MM diameter), it's waterproof (with a screw-down crown), the hands are luminous (visible in the dark), it has an automatic movement (not requiring batteries or manual winding) and its colours are true to the material (no painted surfaces).

The watch is a so-called "annual calendar", which means it can show the correct date with only one manual adjustment per year (during February). An annual calendar "knows" the difference between short and longer months. In haute horlogerie this is a higher end complication, sometimes requiring more than hundredth additional parts. Thanks to Oechslin's brilliant design, this watch only uses only 3 additional parts!

The annual calendar complication using just 3 additional parts

How to read the time, month, date and weekday

As an hidden luxury (it is only noticeable by the wearer), the watch is made lighter by milling away any excess material. While some people prefer a certain heft to communicate (material) value, I appreciate lightweightness as it improves comfort (especially when you're active).
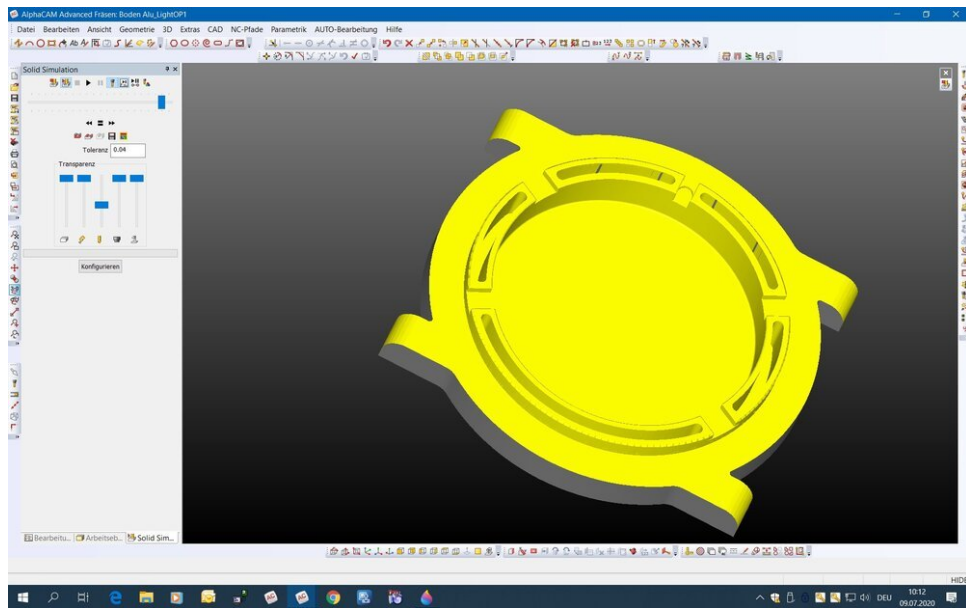
Milling away material to make the watch lighter

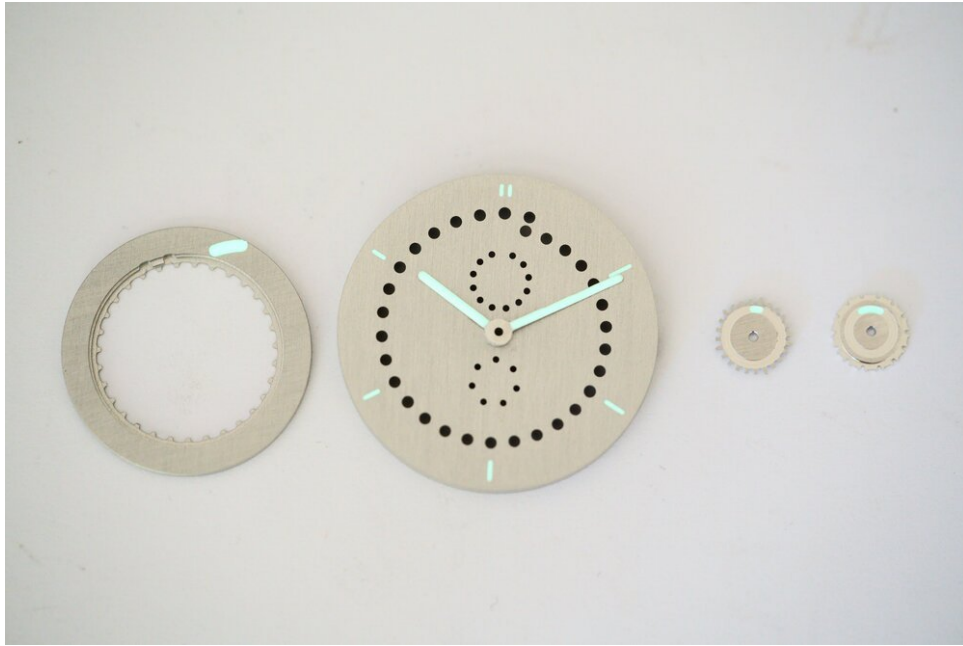*Before (left) and after (right) milling away material*

During the design process I remained in contact with the company. Every now and then I received images from the workshop, keeping me in the loop as things progressed.

The 3D model of my watch case

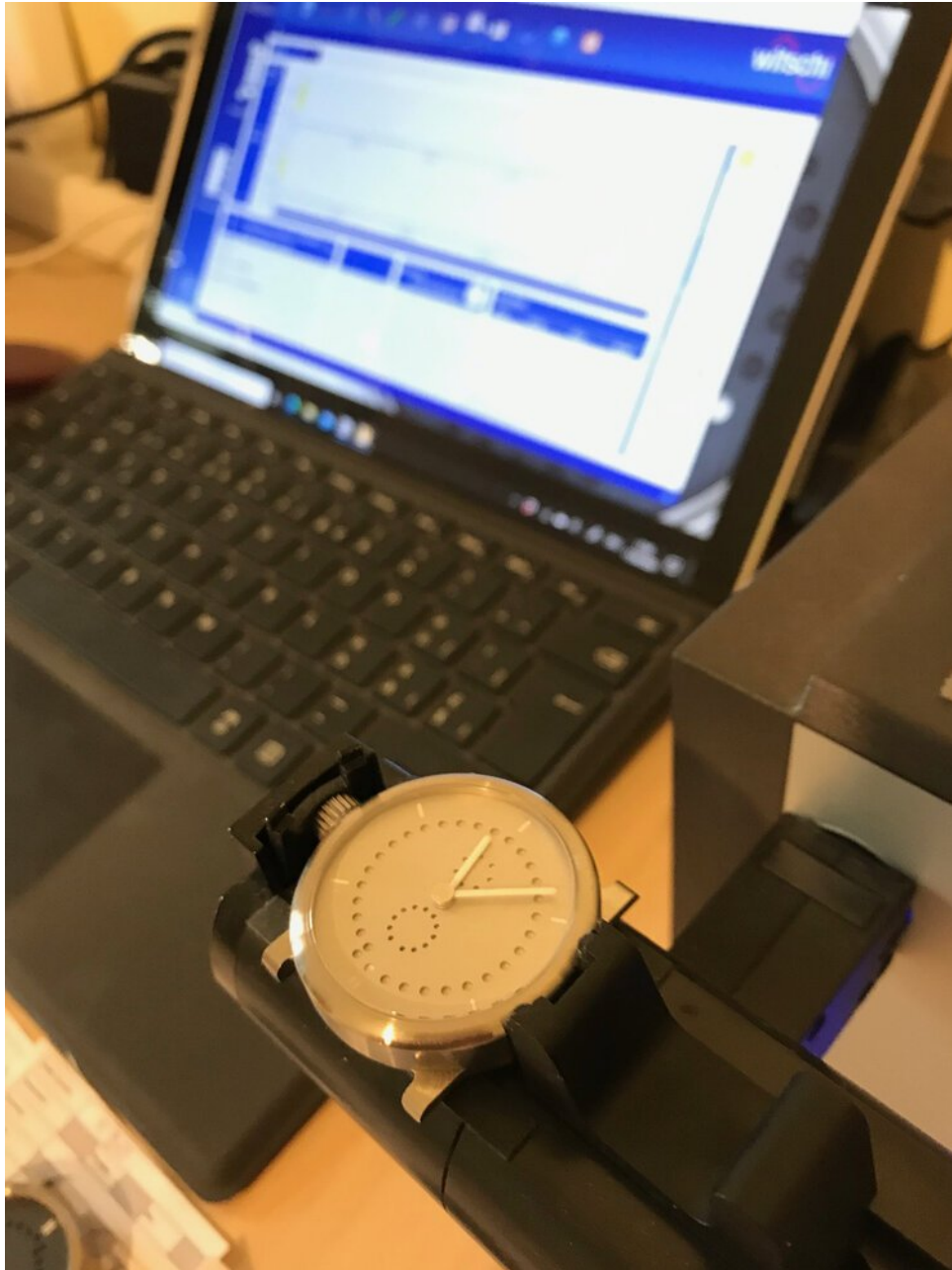*The super luminova makes the watch clearly readable in darkness*

While the subtile contrast allows my watch to fly under the radar during the day

The "maestro" himself working on my watch - this feels like I have picture of Rembrandt painting my very own Nachtwatch!

Before leaving Switzerland the watch is tested and calibrated to make sure it is working well

Delivery day!

After waiting patiently for a few months, I received my watch per mail last month. Normally you're welcome to pick it up in person, but due to all the COVID-19 restrictions I opted for parcel delivery. If you hate paying (import) tax you might want to reconsider this... the Dutch customs' office wanted their part of my piggy bank before releasing my package for import.

My son offered an helping hand while importing his future heirloom piece

It's all about the product, no money or energy is wasted on superflous boxes or booklets - I love this

Like a kid in the candy store - happy me!
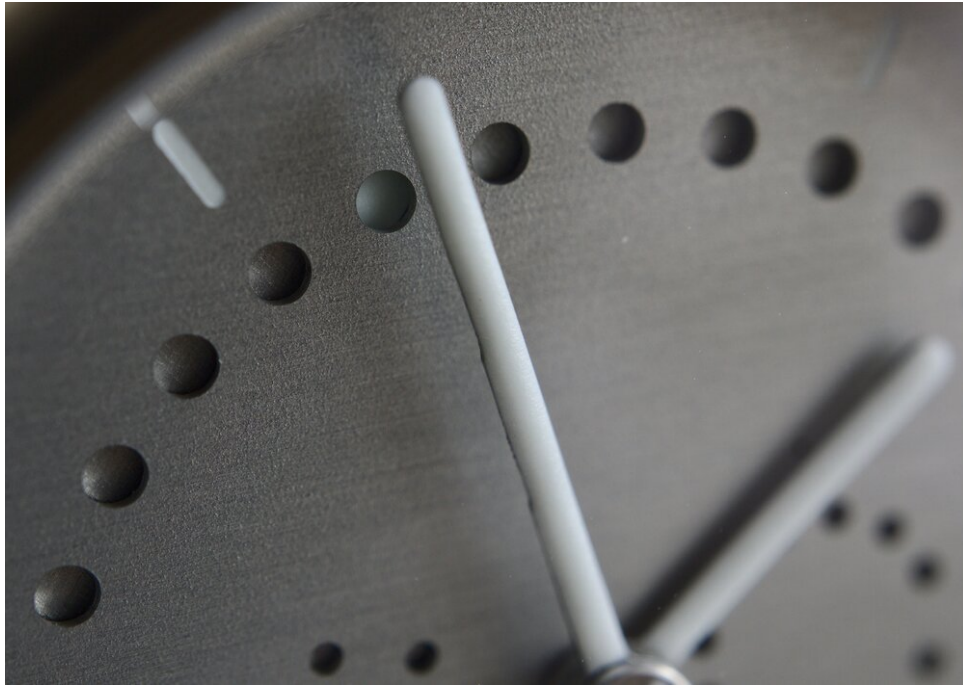
The natural colours work well with light

The sturgeon leather strap is waterproof by nature

The case is milled with extreme precision, making it unnecessary to hide mistakes by polishing (as there aren't any!)

The curved case design is very comfortable on the wrist, as there are no sharp edges sticking in your arm

The dial is spectacular in an "under the radar way" - there is an incredible depth that is hard to capture in a photo (I tried anyway!)

The 36MM size is perfect on my wrist

Changing the strap is easy and transforms the watch - because the watch itself is rather neutral

The black fabric strap features a Kevlar core making it extremely durable and strong - perfect when riding your bike!

The carbon buckle hardly adds any weight

Different colours have different effects on the watch - here you see it with a 'tan'-coloured fabric strap

In line with the "LIGHT"-case of my watch, the buckle of this strap is milled to remove any unneeded weight

Conclusion

While there are many reasons to choose a watch, I wanted my watch to be perfect *for me.* In a fast moving world where things get replaced rapidly by newer fads, spending time and money on a timeless timepiece felt right.

Don't be afraid to make decisions for yourself. Wear the watch you want to wear. If it doesn't exists, don't panic. Thanks to the wonders of our connected world, you can find people that will help you!

Wear the watch you want - if it doesn't exist you can create it!