Made by A. Lange & Söhne:
Tourbograph Perpetual “Pour le Mérite”

TIMELESS WATCHES

Keeping track of time in the watch-making town of Glashütte

Glashütte is an illustrious name in the world of watches. Watches from Glashütte are legendary. Instilled with the passion of their makers for precision craftsmanship and artistic refinement, they embody a very unique zeitgeist. And yet watches from Glashütte are also said to have a timeless beauty. Ever since 1845, watchmakers in Glashütte have been elevating the measurement of time to the status of an art. People are magically drawn to these mechanical miracles, which do nothing more than show the time. How did a small mining town in the Ore Mountains become a centre of world-class watchmaking? And what makes watches from Glashütte so fascinating? A search for clues in the town reveals the answers to these questions.

Glashütte is situated in the Müglitz Valley, south of Dresden. The road leading there winds up a steep, rocky gorge along the Müglitz, a minor mountain river. On entering the small, tranquil town, there appears to be nothing unusual about it at first glance. The Ore Mountains are full of small mining communities like Glashütte. At second glance, however, on arriving at the central square, Ferdinand-Adolph-Lange-Platz, it is impossible to miss the magnificent buildings with their large, brightly lit windows. The signs of famous watchmakers catch the eye: A. Lange & Söhne, Glashütte Original, Moritz Großmann, Mühle, Nomos and Union. Watches made here are among the most sought-after and expensive on the market. New models are presented every year at Baselworld, the world's largest trade fair for clocks and watches, or at the Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie in Geneva. Top of the range worldwide is the Tourbograph Perpetual "Pour le Mérite" by Lange & Söhne, which sells for 480,000 euros.

The best place to start exploring Glashütte is right here at the centre of town, where it all began. A large, stately building stands alone, island-like, between Schillerstrasse and Hauptstrasse. Formerly the German Watchmaking School, it now houses the German Watch Museum. To its left, at Hauptstrasse 12, is a watch shop, where Ferdinand Adolph Lange, Glashütte's most-famous watchmaker, set up the town's first watchmaking business in 1845.

TIME TRAVEL THROUGH THE WORLD OF WATCHES

Glashütte celebrates two anniversaries in 2018: The German Watchmaking School was established 140 years ago in 1878, and the German Watch Museum commemorates its 10th anniversary. It is only thanks to fortunate circumstances that visitors can now

embark on a journey through time here, says museum director Reinhard Reichel. Following the demise of the East German regime after 1989, all clocks in Glashütte seemed to stand still. The only watchmaking company left at the time, Glashütter Uhrenbetriebe – a state-owned enterprise now renamed Glashütte Original – faced an uncertain future.

After German reunification, the collection of historic watches, the library and archive were turned over to the town council, thus preserving these significant testimonies to the past. In 2006 a foundation was set up by the town of Glashütte. One of its benefactors was Glashütte Original, which in turn was supported by the Swatch Group and its founder Nicolas G. Hayek, who had acquired Glashütte Original in 2000. A home for the museum was soon found in the former German Watchmaking School. After the building had been renovated, the German Watch Museum opened on 22 May 2008.

Swing System by NOMOS Glashütte – one of the most important innovations in recent years

Watch enthusiasts can explore the complete history of watchmaking here in all its detail: Exhibits from the early years of watchmaking, tools from the watchmaking school, the evolution of clockwork from the 19th to the 20th century, a restoration workshop, and of course the vault, with its gold and gem-studded pocket watches. The museum also showcases the nine watchmaking companies currently in Glashütte along with their collections. “This is the most important room in the exhibition. We are not a museum that is restricted to a certain period. Time literally does not stop here. Watchmaking not only has a great history, but also a vibrant present”, Reinhard Reichel points out.

The Glashütte watchmaking industry was back in business within two decades following German reunification. Exactly 145 years after the cottage industry had been established by Ferdinand Adolph Lange, his great-grandson Walter Lange registered Lange Uhren GmbH as a new company on 7 December 1990. Other companies followed: Glashütte Original (1990), Nomos Glashütte (1990), Nautische Instrumente Mühle-Glashütte (1994), Union Uhrenfabrik (1996), SUG - Sächsische Uhrentechnologie Glashütte (1998), Bruno Söhnle (2000), Wempe Chronometerwerke (2005) and Moritz Grossmann (2008). Some 2,000 people are now employed in watchmaking in the town. Many are proud of having worked here for generations. The watch brands have become closely interwoven with the name of the town, a tradition that all new companies established since 1990 have drawn on.

In 2014, NOMOS Glashütte caused a sensation when it presented its proprietary Nomos Swing System at the Baselworld watch show. Comprising a balance, balance spring, escape wheel and pallet, the system powers a mechanical watch and sets the pace. Up until then, this mechanism was considered too sophisticated, complicated and expensive for a small watchmaking company to build itself. It would have to be made by hand, which would push up the price of the finished product. A special manufacturer in Switzerland had therefore gained what was essentially a monopoly on the business and was supplying virtually the entire watchmaking industry. But NOMOS Glashütte now has its own swing system and is no longer dependent on suppliers. What is more, the new system is not only of the highest quality, it can also be mass-produced, meaning the watches themselves are no more expensive.

IN KEEPING WITH THE TIMES

Watches were and always will be handcrafted marvels comprising more than 300 or even 400 individual parts. “Despite the omnipresence of time displays in modern media, people are still fascinated by the technology of a mechanical timepiece. That’s why they are still so popular around the world”, explains Reichel. Even 100 years ago, it was a considerable financial outlay to purchase a high-quality watch, and the same is true today. The watches have both tangible and intangible value, and they carry a six-digit price tag.

There are many reasons for wearing a watch made in Glashütte: They are technically fascinating objects, have a connection to Saxony, are given as presents on special occasions or worn as prestigious status symbols. Despite the radical digital transformation we are currently experiencing, or maybe even because of it, people seem to be reverting to more intangible values, and this is fuelling demand for premium watches. For as long as watches have been made in Glashütte, they have been an expression of the individual who wears them. Almost always

A look at the inside workings of a mechanical pocket watch is always fascinating

Glashütte Original

SENATOR EXCELLENCE PANORAMADATUM

Award:
Goldene Unruh 2018

Lange & Söhne

LANGE 1

Award:
German Design Award 2017,
Luxury Goods category

Lange & Söhne

TOURBOGRAPH PERPETUAL "POUR LE MÉRITE"

Award:
Goldene Unruh 2018

ordered with a personal engraving, the watches are highly sought-after, also because of the long waiting times and the small production quantities.

Much of what makes the legend of Glashütte so special today was already part of the clever plan devised by its founding father, Ferdinand Adolph Lange. Its success story can be traced back to the Royal Cabinet of Mathematical and Physical Instruments in Dresden, which had its roots in 1560. This institution already had a watchmaking shop and is where Johann Christian Friedrich Gutkaes, watchmaker to the royal Saxon court, worked in the 19th century. Ferdinand Adolph Lange was apprenticed to him in 1830 as a young man, before working in Switzerland and France, where he collected many new ideas.

It was the dawn of the industrial revolution. As the railways and factories expanded, precise, synchronous time measurement became increasingly important. In 1841, Lange returned to Dresden with a vision: He wanted to establish a watchmaking industry in the Ore Mountains. This new branch of business was a welcome substitute for mining, which was in decline. In 1843 he submitted his concept to the Royal Saxon government, which agreed to his plan and granted him a loan. Lange was able to set up his company in 1845 and start training apprentices.

A TOWN RUNS LIKE CLOCKWORK

After his first 15 apprentices had completed their training, Lange offered to help them specialise in the production of a part of a watch and set up their own shops. One started to make dials, the other hands, yet another made cogs or balance springs, etc. In this way, a cottage industry emerged in Glashütte based on division of labour and modelled on the publishing industry. Concentrated in one location, this specialised industry continued for decades and contributed to the success of each watch brand in the town. As a result, the quality of the watches rocketed as each generation of watchmakers endeavoured to outdo the last. From then on, Glashütte itself ran like clockwork. The precise interplay of the many small shops worked to the town's advantage. None was dependent on external suppliers. "That is part of the magic of the Glashütte microcosm", says Reinhard Reichel.

Over time, a group of entrepreneurs formed around Lange, including Julius Assmann, Moritz Grossmann and Adolf Schneider. Their pioneering spirit, craftsmanship and passion for precision mechanics established Glashütte's global reputation. They turned the town's name into a trademark. Pocket watches from Glashütte struck a chord among consumers in the years of rapid industrial

Nomos Glashütte

METRO NEOMATIK 39 SILVERCUT

Award:
iF Design Award 2018

Moritz Grossmann

TEFNUT TWIST CLASSIC

Award:
Eve's Watch Award 2017,
Best Innovation category

Moritz Grossmann

BENU TOURBILLON

Award:
Judges Choice Award
at Starhill Gallery Awards 2016

expansion during the German Empire, particularly from the 1870s onwards. They were highly accurate technical masterpieces, the epitome of luxury, and a symbol of the bourgeois lifestyle.

TRACES OF TIME

Many of the buildings where the famous watchmakers had their workshops have been preserved. Visitors can follow in their footsteps on a tour through town. The museum is an ideal place to start. The first point of call is the house at Hauptstrasse 12, where Ferdinand Adolph Lange first set up shop. Visitors can also explore the town on their own, guided by a brief brochure and information panels at the various historic sites. Visitors discover that where the museum – formerly the German Watchmaking School – now stands, was once a green pasture. Not until the watchmaking industry became established did the town begin to grow, develop an urban infrastructure and eventually get a stop along the railway line from Dresden. The second generation of entrepreneurs even built homes for their workers. In the boom years during the German Empire, all signs pointed to expansion. In 1873 Ferdinand A. Lange's sons built a new head office near the railway station, the town's first major factory.

TIME NEVER STANDS STILL

This long period of economic growth was followed by a sharp downturn. Towards the end of the First World War, wristwatches became the standard worldwide. The watchmakers in Glashütte did not go along with this trend at first. The demand for pocket watches continued to fall and several companies went bankrupt. In the 1920s, the watchmaking businesses in Glashütte turned to other precision mechanical products to ensure their survival, such as calculating machines, measuring instruments and typewriters, until new companies took up the production of wristwatches.

Nevertheless, despite the many twists of fate in the history of watchmaking in Glashütte, continuity prevails, as museum director Reichel points out. German reunification in 1990 was not really a new beginning either, but rather a continuation of the old tradition. The design principles and quality standards have endured for more than 170 years, despite past upheavals. Accuracy, resilience, beauty and lasting value were always good reasons for buying a watch from Glashütte. At the end of a brochure about the watch museum, it says: "Time never stands still in Glashütte". What a wonderful thought!