



PATEK PHILIPPE SHOWCASES RARE
HANDCRAFTS WITH THE SKY MOON
TOURBILLON REF. 6002

ART WORKS

BY LAURIE KAHLE

“IT’S ABSOLUTE GENIUS WORK,” says our guide, Karin Deléchat, as she points out the exquisite 17th- and 18th-century enamel timepieces in the historical collection of Geneva’s Patek Philippe Museum. The museum, which opened in 2001, houses the world’s ultimate watch collection, tracing the evolution of Patek Philippe as well as watchmaking in general. Since early timepieces were extremely inaccurate, watches were often treated as objets d’art, lavishly embellished with engraving, jewelery, enameling and other decorative arts to convey the wealth and status of their owners. As portable works of art, the enamel pieces vividly depict religious, romantic and pastoral scenes, as well as portraits of their well-heeled owners. “We still have enamel watches, but much of the knowledge and know-how has been lost, and we do not have the same materials anymore,” adds Deléchat.



One of a pair of mirror-image Piguet & Meylan quarter repeating watches, ca. 1820
Above: Piguet & Meylan quarter-repeating watch in the form of a rose, also ca. 1820



The newly unveiled Patek Philippe Ref. 6002 Sky Moon Tourbillon

The following evening at its boutique on the Rue du Rhône, Patek Philippe unveiled its Sky Moon Tourbillon Ref. 6002, with an elaborately engraved 18-karat white gold case and a beautifully executed enamel dial blending cloisonné and champlevé techniques. The fanciful aesthetic, particularly the flamboyant case, may shock devotees of the Geneva brand's famously sober style. However, those who have visited the museum to view the unique pieces Patek has made for kings, queens, popes and industrialists over the past 174 years recognize that such elaborate creations are very much in keeping with the manufacture's illustrious heritage. "It's a technical showpiece for certain," says Larry Pettinelli, president of Patek Philippe's US agency, of the Ref. 6002. "There are very few artisans who are capable of this type of work, and we are fortunate to employ a number of them at Patek."

Since the Stern family acquired Patek Philippe in 1932, four generations of the Stern family have dedicated themselves

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to preserving scores of precious historical examples of watchmaking's decorative handcrafts in its private collection, while also continually commissioning Switzerland's few remaining masters to continue producing them. Deléchat explains that the company still works with about 15 enamellers, including the legendary Suzanne Rohr. Despite being in her 80s, she continues to practice the painstaking ancient technique of miniature enamel painting using brushes composed of a single hair. "It takes her 400 hours to complete one enamel work, and she cannot work more than four hours per day because it is so hard on her eyes," says Deléchat.



Back and front views of the 18-karat white gold Ref. 6002



Breguet & Fils quarter repeater cabriolet watch, made for the Turkish market, ca. 1810

Perhaps the oldest of watchmaking's decorative *métiers d'art*, engraving is performed by hand using burins, needles, chisels and other sharp metal blades to sculpt and embellish the case with various patterns, monograms, coats of arms and even miniature scenes. Only about a dozen registered engravers continue the practice in Geneva, which once counted almost 200 engravers on the city rolls. Using techniques of relief and line engraving, artisans decorate the entire surface of the Ref. 6002's case—including the bezel and the lugs—with a flowing, scrolling pattern that is echoed at the center of the dial in cloisonné enamel.

Patek Philippe has long employed the ancient technique of cloisonné enameling to create its dome clocks, World Time watches and special commissions. Artists begin by working with a tiny flattened gold wire that is finely shaped to outline the desired motif. Individual cells framed by the wire are then filled with enamel powders that are melted and fused in an oven. While the dial of the Ref. 6002 is blue, more extravagant cloisonné dials can include as many as 30 colors and require up to 15 firings in an oven heated to 850°C, a process that can take a week to complete.

While its packaging is strikingly ornate, the movement of the Ref. 6002 is almost identical to that of the original Sky Moon Tourbillon Ref. 5002, which launched in 2001 and remains the brand's most complicated wristwatch ever with 12 complications on two dials. In addition to a minute repeater with two cathedral gongs and a tourbillon, the front dial includes a

perpetual calendar with retrograde date and moon-phase displays. The rear dial features astronomical functions including a star map of the northern sky, sidereal time indication, and the angular progression and phases of the moon (unlike the 5002, which indicates moon age). The new piece also uses apertures instead of hands to indicate day of the week, month and leap year.

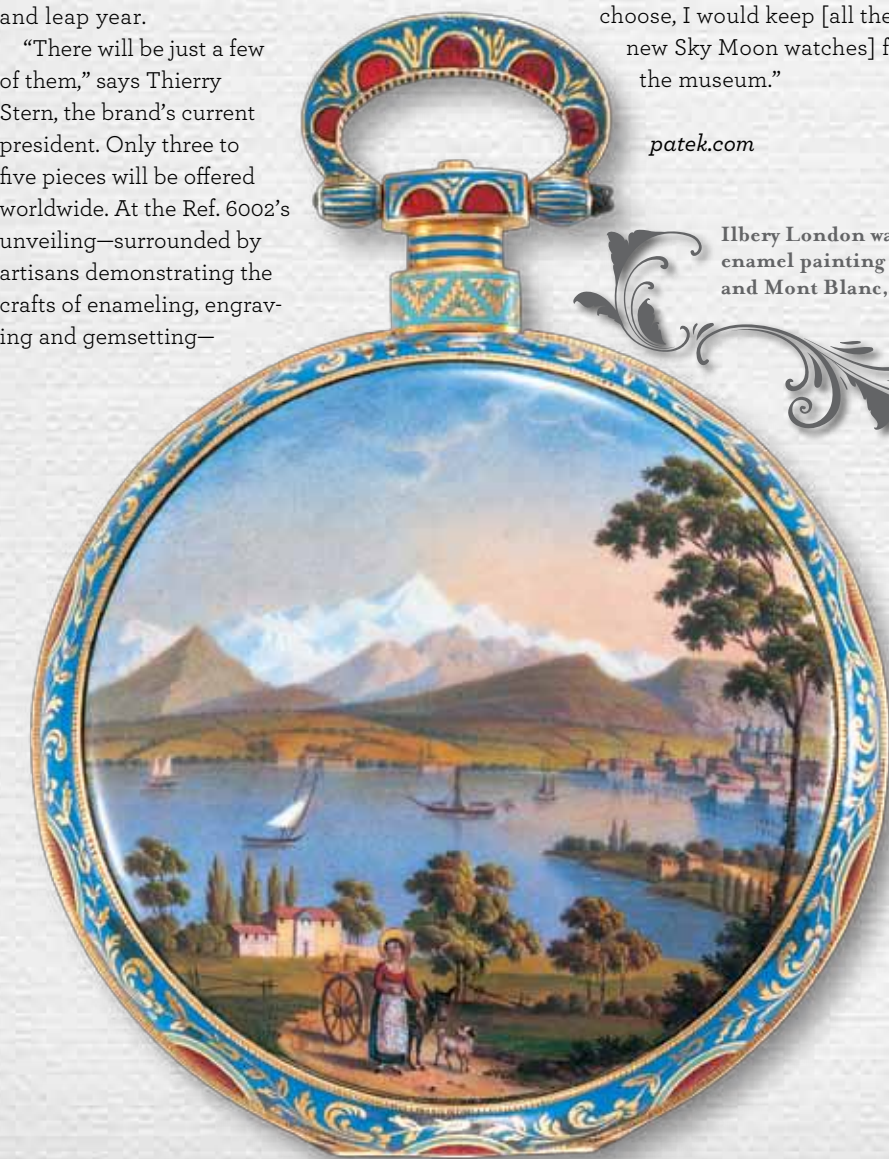
"There will be just a few of them," says Thierry Stern, the brand's current president. Only three to five pieces will be offered worldwide. At the Ref. 6002's unveiling—surrounded by artisans demonstrating the crafts of enameling, engraving and gemsetting—

Stern shared his childhood memories of his grandfather and father introducing him to the beautifully decorated timepieces in their collection. In the 1940s, Thierry's grandfather Henri Stern realized that watchmaking's centuries-old decorative handcrafts were dying out, spurring him to acquire and build a collection of treasures to preserve for posterity. That collection is now shared with the public at the Patek Philippe Museum. Furthermore, he continued to produce such pieces, a legacy that has been sustained by his son Philippe and now by Thierry.

"Today, extraordinary enamel dials are once again fashionable," says Thierry, who notes that there was a time when his father was the only one who continued to commission enamel pieces even when no one was interested in buying them. "We are talking about a very rare field. It is preserved because some brands, like us, have been working with the artisans for so long. We do that with pleasure, to be frank; we don't do that for business. If I could choose, I would keep [all the new Sky Moon watches] for the museum."

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Ilbery London watch with enamel painting of Geneva and Mont Blanc, ca. 1820



All antique watches from the collection of the Patek Philippe Museum