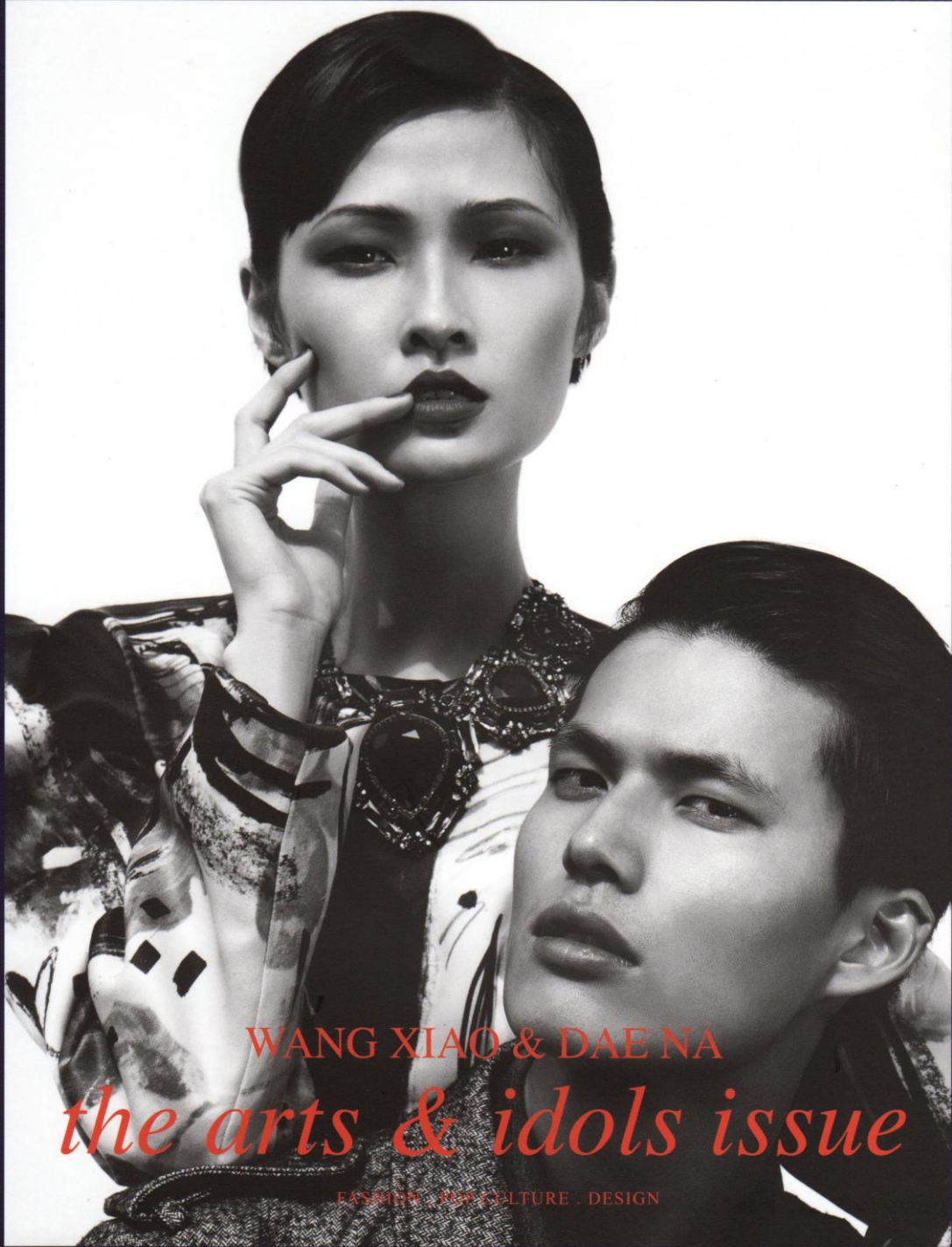


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WINNING HANDS DOWN

Ludovic Ballouard is arguably the most coveted independent Swiss watchmaker not everyone's got wind of. Following his debut with the Upside Down in 2010, the former protégé of F.P. Journe has now stepped forward as the one to watch in haute horlogerie.

TEXT : Kee



French-born Ludovic Ballouard is an independent watchmaker packing some hefty credentials. After three years of employment under Franck Muller, he boldly took his career to the atelier of living haute horlogerie legend François-Paul Journe, where he spent nearly a decade shaping his technical chops. His move paid dividends as Ballouard played a key role in the development of F.P. Journe's celebrated *Sonnerie Souveraine*, a grande sonnerie complication timepiece that chimes the hour and quarter hours at regular intervals – think of it as a grandfather's clock with a high level of complexity. (Restricting the chimes to only quarter hours, repeating the time on-demand, silent mode).

Why are we talking up another watch? That is because there aren't many watchmakers today who can attest to conceiving one, let alone participate in its creation. In other words, there isn't a traditional implication that Ballouard wouldn't be able to tap his head around after this experience. His intuition? Going independent and creating those complications that others would hope to emulate is much like the career path of his idol and mentor François-Paul Journe.

After leaving F.P. Journe and flying solo in 2009, Ballouard released his debut timepiece nine months after. It was a complication timepiece aptly named

Upside Down, and it initially resembled a so-called tribute to both Ballouard's watchmaking mentors. Its 41mm case shape and lugs has the elegance of an F.P. Journe, while the plot to its complication centres on the wild antics of its titanium hour markers which shares the same innovative spirit as Franck Muller's renowned *Crazy Hours*.

Like the man who built it, its brilliance is hugely understated. The premise of the timepiece is in the 12 rotating hour markers, with 11 numerals positioned upside down and the correct hour the right side up. (For clearer indication, Ballouard has added a dot on the hour disc pinpointing the current hour.) When the blued steel central minute hand strikes the 12 o'clock position at every 60-minute interval, the past hour marker will make a 180-degree rotation facing upside down and in quick succession trigger the next hour marker to the right side up. This acrobatic-like mechanical switcheroo is thanks to mini-Maltese crosses that control the rotating mechanisms.

More often than not, the simpler it looks, the harder it is for the watchmaker to accomplish – and this world's first certainly falls into that category. Ballouard had to create this 228-part manual-winding movement from scratch, this version he calls the Calibre B01 (not to be confused with

Breitling's).

Believe it or not, his challenge was self-created too. He wanted the wearer to witness the beauty of the movement at work when two hour discs *pass the baton* after clocking another hour – all visible from the case back. The technical hurdle was that he needed 12 holes to be drilled onto the base of the movement plate for the tiny pinions that control the discs. He would tell you that it would have been much simpler to have them engineered just under the dial and hidden from view. But to Ballouard's credit, the path of least resistance is the one he wishes to avoid.

If mass appeal was in Ballouard's original plans, then we'd reckon he would be pushing orders by the truckloads. He places his faith with platinum to house his complication – a precious metal that he promises to be the foundation of all his future timepieces. This effectively pushes up his costs and outprices a segment of clientele. But this is also his way of setting the tone for his eponymous label: high-end, ingeniously complicated, and damn proud to be an independent.

www.ballouard.com