

CVSTOS A BELLES MONTRES – PARIS

Olivier Muller for Worldtempus – Photos: David Carteron

Cvstos La Cvstos Eiffel vue par... M. Eiffel © WorldTempus

In January, Cvstos launched a piece in tribute to Gustave Eiffel. WorldTempus succeeded in bringing the piece together with one of the direct descendants of the engineer himself. A conversation spanning a century.



It was a unique conjunction in watchmaking. While exhibiting the new version of its “Gustave Eiffel” at the Belles Montres trade fair, the brand received a visit from... Mr Philippe Couperie-Eiffel, a direct descendant of the man himself! While the two worlds had indeed already collided, notably in developing this unique timepiece paying tribute to the genius of Mr Eiffel, this particular physical encounter was anything but ordinary, since seeing the Eiffel on Mr Eiffel’s wrist is no everyday

event. WorldTempus grabbed this unique opportunity to capture their vision of each other.

WorldTempus: What connections do you maintain with the memory of your great-great-grandfather, and therefore with the watch that pays tribute to him?

Philippe Couperie-Eiffel: The connection? Switzerland! I spent many summers in Vevey at Gustave Eiffel’s property. I was very close to his daughter, Valentine, who died when I was 16. I grew up in close and direct contact with Gustave Eiffel, surrounded by his souvenirs, his plans, his splendour. Valentine left me his will, a unique document that also nurtured the writing of my book Eiffel by Eiffel.

Why did you choose a watch as the symbol of your admiration for him?

Every part of this great man’s history is summed up this object: the mechanics, the precision, Switzerland. In Antonio Terranova, the co-founder of Cvstos, I encountered a very meticulous man. A friend introduced us and I must say I was immediately taken with him. Antonio was very interested in our family and we talked a lot. He understood my motivation to pay tribute to Gustave Eiffel through exceptional objects.



La Gustave Eiffel sur la reproduction des derniers ordres de son illustre inspirateur, dans l'ouvrage que lui a dédié Philippe Couperie-Eiffel © David Carteron/Delos Communications

How were you involved personally in the creation of the piece?

I went to Cvstos' workshop several times. For example, I wanted to achieve a very light watch. That's what my great-great-grandfather would have wanted. He himself was a pioneer in terms of very open, airy architecture. You can see it clearly in his use of St Andrew's cross on the Tower which bears his name.

Generally speaking, I didn't get involved in the aesthetics of the piece. I maintained an engineer's perspective, just as Gustave Eiffel would have done. And parallel to this, another constant concern was to create a sustainable object. That is the essential characteristic of my ancestor's work. Nobody truly knows the full scope of his work, which ranges from the Tower to the Panama Canal, through railway lines, bridges, viaducts, railway stations, etc.

Are you considering other projects of this kind?

I can't take the liberty of revealing them before discussing such plans with Cvstos! For now, we are presenting a model with a new silver-toned finish. I know what the immediate future holds, but I think you'll have to wait for Baselworld ... As for me, my primary concern is ensuring that the name of Eiffel is duly preserved and respected. I fought for a long time – and won – against an international BTP group who were using our name in an unauthorised manner [Editor's note: the Eiffage vs Eiffel case, lost by the former in January 2010]. It is now protected. Currently, I would like to open a museum in his honour in Vevey, where he lived for a long time, and perhaps even a memorial in Panama. Today, we are 60 direct descendants. I think that it is our duty to undertake activities like this in his memory.