

Art OF THE MACHINE



*Giuliano Mazzuoli, the Italian design
mastermind behind Manometro and the
new Contagiri, speaks out.*

In 2004, the watch world witnessed the debut of the Manometro, a unusual-looking wristwatch made in Italy that combined a Swiss-made mechanical movement with a case and dial design inspired by a tire pressure gauge (“Manometro” means “pressure gauge” in Italian). This successful launch begat the follow-up, Manometro S, a sportier version with a carbon-fiber case and titanium crown; and the Manometro Cronografo, a chronograph showcasing unconventional diagonal placement of the crowns, pushers and subdials.

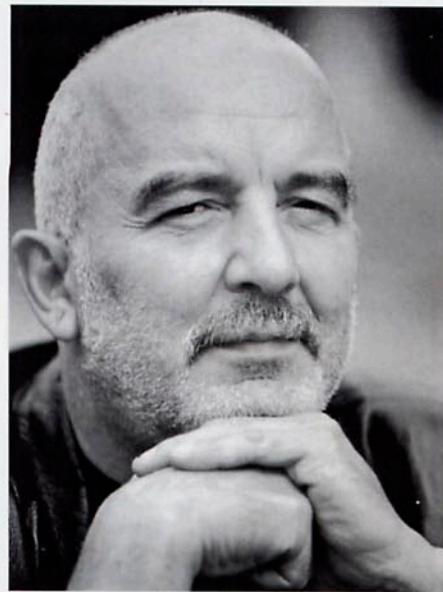
All are the brainchildren of iconoclastic Tuscan designer Giuliano Mazzuoli, who took over his father’s paper-goods business in 1953 and turned it into a design firm that produced, among other products, aesthetically innovative books and catalogs for New York’s Museum of Modern Art before tackling the challenge of envisioning a totally new type of fine timepiece. Mazzuoli’s design philosophy, expressed in the Moka line of avant-garde pens as well as the Manometro watches, involves taking the forms and properties of common, every-

day objects and applying them in new and intriguing ways.

His latest watch creation, the Swiss-made Contagiri, is inspired by the dashboard rev counter of the Alfa Romeo GT racecar. It keeps time by means of a single retrograde hand that moves like a counter’s needle in an arc from 1 to 12 o’clock. Mazzuoli, who raced Alfas in the 1970s and cultivated a passion for these iconic Italian automobiles, introduced the watch at an event in Florence’s Piazza della Signoria, in concert with the release of the limited-edition Alfa Romeo 8C Competizione car. Recently, he spoke to *WatchTime* managing editor Mark Bernardo about the new model and his thoughts on watch design.

WT: How did your father’s company contribute to your interest in design?

GM: My father contributed little to my interest in design because he died when I was 17 years old. I am sure if he had been alive he would have appreciated my interest in design. When he built his house, I noticed that he put in elements that made the house unlike every other house in the area. The house wasn’t made with precious ma-



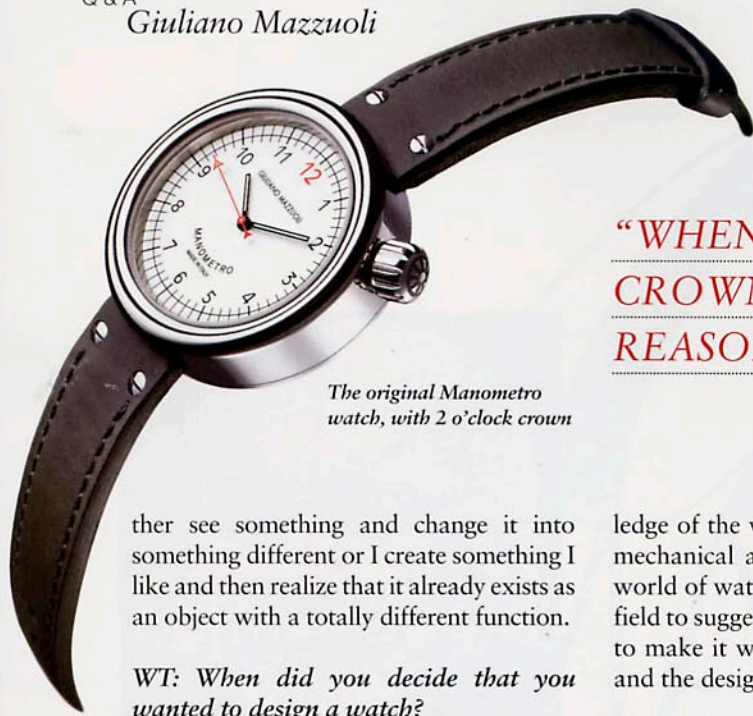
terials but from design objects that were simple and modern that made it stand out.

WT: What do you recall about some of your earliest creative projects?

GM: My earliest creative projects are tied to the world of graphic design, specifically that of paper goods. One of the first things I ever created was a phone book back in the late 1960s. I was still very young at the time.

WT: Your reputation is one of being inspired by everyday objects. What is the story behind the inspiration for your Moka pen line?

GM: I believe that everything that can possibly be designed has already been done, so you either use something that has already been created as an inspiration for something new or you try to design something from scratch only to discover before too long that what you have designed already exists. When I designed the Moka pen I was sketching the idea for a new pen and after I finished I realized that the pen looked like the coffee machine designed by Alfonso Bialetti. I ei-



The original Manometro watch, with 2 o'clock crown

“WHEN PEOPLE ASK ME WHY I PUT THE CROWN AT 2 O’CLOCK, I ASK IF THERE IS A REASON WHY IT SHOULD BE AT 3 O’CLOCK.”

ther see something and change it into something different or I create something I like and then realize that it already exists as an object with a totally different function.

WT: *When did you decide that you wanted to design a watch?*

GM: I had wanted to make a watch for a long time. I decided to do it when I encountered an object that inspired me. I saw a pressure gauge and I saw that it looked like all other pressure gauges, and in this object I found the inspiration for my first watch.

WT: *What was it about the look of a pressure gauge that made it appeal to you as a design for a watch dial?*

GM: Once I found the object to serve as my inspiration for a watch, I wanted to respect its clean, simple, and minimalist design. The pressure gauge’s design lent itself to being transformed into a watch.

WT: *What was the reason for positioning the crown at the 2 o’clock position?*

GM: When people ask me this question, I ask them if there is a reason why the crown should be at 3 o’clock.

WT: *Had you always planned to manufacture the first Manometro watch in Italy? Or did you consider having it made in Switzerland or elsewhere?*

GM: I thought about making the watch in Switzerland but I am a supporter of “Made in Italy” and I am proud of my country’s tradition of quality craftsmanship.

WT: *What was the extent of your knowledge about the watch industry and about the mechanical and technical aspects involved?*

GM: I do not have an extensive know-

ledge of the watch industry or about the mechanical and technical aspects of the world of watches. I rely on experts in the field to suggest what to put inside a watch to make it work once I develop the idea and the design for it.

WT: *Have you become more educated in those technical aspects now?*

GM: I realize that as time passes I learn more and more about the technical part of watchmaking but it’s not because I have a particular interest in that process. It just happens naturally the more I am exposed to this world.

WT: *Aside from its distinctive design, what aspects of the Manometro watch set it apart from other sporty wristwatches?*

GM: I think that Manometro has an immediate impact upon whoever is looking at it. I think anyone would appreciate that they are looking at something different and distinctly minimal.

WT: *Is there anyone else in the watch field today whose designs you enjoy or find interesting?*

GM: There are many watches I like and that I have come to admire. They are watches that I could have never been able to create because I approach watch design from a more practical aspect that is not based on traditional watch design. If someone asked me to design a watch I would come back to them later and tell them I wasn’t able to design a watch but I designed a great-looking nutcracker.

WT: *What are some of the watches you remember wearing and/or admiring when you were younger?*

GM: When I was young I followed the trends in watches — which at the time

were all rather small in their dimension.

WT: *Are simplicity and clarity the most important factors in designing a watch? If not, what do you consider the most important factors?*

GM: Someone important in the world of design once said that simplicity is the most difficult thing to design. I cannot say that in all of my objects there is simplicity, but I try to incorporate simplicity in the objects I create and leave it to others to notice what I have done.

WT: *What made you decide to create a chronograph version of the original Manometro? And was it a challenge to maintain the integrity of the dial’s clean, simple design while incorporating this complication?*

GM: I am the owner of a company that needs to do business as well as to create designs. The market asked for a chronograph and I developed the Manometro from a time-only piece into a chronograph — not by respecting the rules of chronograph design but by respecting the design philosophy of Manometro. I did not transform Manometro into a chronograph but transformed a chronograph in the image of Manometro. This also goes back to the idea of putting the crown at 2 o’clock on Manometro. By keeping the crown at 2 o’clock on the chronograph I rotated everything on the dial, including the “Giuliano Mazzuoli” and “Manometro” logos and the subdials, and kept the 12 always at the top. Everything else could be rotated around but the 12 had to stay at the top.

WT: *What other complications — second time zone, et cetera — might we see one day in a Manometro watch?*

GM: To answer this question we have to



The lever in the side of the Contagiri's case works like a car's gearshift, allowing the user to set the time in one gear and wind the watch in the other, both via the bezel.

“THE IDEA FOR THE CONTAGIRI CAME TO ME WHILE SITTING IN MY CAR... I SAW THE TACHYMETER STARING AT ME, SAYING IT COULD BECOME A WATCH.”

wait a few months. People will be surprised when my idea finally comes out, because no one has ever thought of something like this for a watch. People will ask themselves how no one ever thought of it.

WT: *What was the motivation behind your new watch, the Contagiri, and what is its connection to the Alfa Romeo automobile?*

GM: The idea of creating a watch linked to Alfa Romeo was born from an opportunity given to me by one of the owners of the Alfa Romeo company, Lapo Elkann. At the time I told him that I would never create a watch linked to Alfa Romeo unless I had the right idea for it. I respected this historic brand too much, especially because of my past experiences racing with Alfa Romeo in the 1960s and 1970s. The right idea came to me 10 minutes af-

ter our meeting. I was sitting in my car and saw the tachymeter staring at me, saying that it could become a watch.

WT: *How does the Contagiri differ technically and aesthetically from the existing Manometro line and from all other watches?*

GM: In creating Contagiri I wanted to respect the minimalism of a tachymeter and so I didn't want the watch to have a crown. The watch would be an automatic, so it needed to be charged and the time needed to be set. I had to give the watch these functions without changing too much the design of a tachymeter. Instead of counting revolutions of the engine the instrument had to measure time. I figured that the watch could be wound up by the bezel, but I also had to solve the problem of how to set the time. My solution was

SPECS

CONTAGIRI BY GIULIANO MAZZUOLI

Manufacturer: Giuliano Mazzuoli SRL

Reference number: not available

Functions: Hours, minutes, seconds; revolving bezel sets and winds the watch; central retrograde hour hand moves in a 270° arc

Movement: Soprod A10, automatic; 11 ½ lignes; 25 jewels, frequency = 28,800 vph; 42-hour power reserve; bidirectional winding rotor; Incabloc shock protection; côtes de Genève decoration, retrograde module

Case: Stainless steel, white gold or black gold with sapphire crystal, water-resistant to 3 ATM

Strap and clasp: rubber strap with tongue buckle or butterfly buckle with Mazzuoli logo inscription

Dimensions: Diameter = 44 mm, height = 13.3 mm

Price: Approx. \$18,000 (stainless steel); approx. \$25,000 (Alfa Romeo 8C edition, white-gold or black-gold case, limited to 501 pieces; and GTA edition, white-gold-and-black-gold case, limited to 1,050 pieces)

incorporating a gearshift that could wind the watch and change the time all from the bezel by moving the gearshift. I then let the watch experts go to work on making my idea a reality. The watch is a one-hand retrograde: the hand goes to 12:30 and then flies back, simulating the movement of the tachymeter in a car.

WT: *Is it your goal to one day have “Made in Italy” as prestigious as “Swiss Made” on a watch?*

GM: As far as the technical aspects of watchmaking, it's important to be “Swiss Made,” like the Contagiri, and all my watches have reliable Swiss movements inside of them. However, I also believe that from a design standpoint it's important for an Italian watch to be recognized as such, and I am proud to say the Manometro is still “Made in Italy.” ○