

German Watchmaking Sponsored
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Handmade Art

BY ELIZABETH DOERR

WatchBuys presents a dream team of German handcrafted watchmaking: Jochen Benzinger and Hermann Grieb.

If they weren't so damn innovative in their appearance, the movements of these watches might seem to have been made a hundred or more years ago. The techniques used in their manufacture are the same that have been used in traditional watchmaking for centuries – no CNC, no CAD/CAM, none of the modern tricks

of the trade. The only concession to today's world can be found in the decidedly modern take of their decoration and use of color, achieved by tempering, a process that sees the steel heated until it takes on a deep blue color.

Behind the beautiful appearance of these movements is none other than Jochen Benzinger, one of only a few artisans left today in Germany able to perform the vintage art of guilloché. Not only that, but he is also a true master in the art of engraving and skeletonizing.

Pair all this delicious artistic know-how with the vintage move-

ments found and overhauled by another master of the traditional watchmaking craft, and what you get is truly unique. Benzinger has been acquainted with master watchmaker Hermann Grieb for years, but only recently did the two decide to pool their resources to create some of the most spectacular examples of watchmaking to come about in the last decade.

Enter WatchBuys, North America's premier retailer for German mechanicals. These creative connoisseurs had the astounding idea to offer the results of Benzinger and Grieb's art as a "brand."

The artists

Jochen Benzinger is widely known among industry insiders as a guillocheur and engraver *par excellence*. He works behind the scenes for a great number of reputable companies, beautifying



Benzinger's workshop probably has one of the biggest collections of guilloché engines in the world.

Jochen Benzinger using a rose engine to guilloché.



Grieb's IWC Caliber 97 with Benzinger's masterful decoration.

their movements and dials with his skilled hands and eyes.

A master engraver, self-taught in the art of guilloché, 45-year-old Benzinger acquired a great number of vintage rose engines and guilloché straight-cutters from the reputable Kollmar company when it closed its doors in Pforzheim. His workshop now rivals any museum when it comes to possessing the tools needed to perform this special art.

Hermann Grieb is a 52-year-old master watchmaker who learned the art of watchmaking in the wholly classic manner, including time as an apprentice and a journeyman before completing his master training at Pforzheim's school for watchmaking and goldsmithing.

He founded his special little workshop for antique watches and clocks in Dätzingen Castle, a baroque edifice built in 1263. Grieb loves to explain how a clockmaker originally lived on the premises to care for the mantle clocks, grandfather clocks and later pocket watches that graced every room of the manor. His workshop is now located here as a commemoration to and continuation of these early days of watchmaking.

these ticking treasures.

Grieb is an expert in traditional mechanics, and one of his greatest joys is to search out vintage pocket watch movements. These old movements – barely recognizable for what they are when he finds them – are then lovingly restored by the master.

Grieb & Benzinger

WatchBuys currently offers two separate lines made by these masters of their respective crafts.

The first is a series of unique pieces that go by the name of Grieb & Benzinger. What started as an idea for select collectors has now blossomed into a sought-after series of unique pieces available to anyone.

The first piece offered by WatchBuys features a rare example of Caliber 51K made by the Record Watch Company of Geneva and Tramelan. This company, founded in 1903, was taken over by Longines in 1961. Grieb, with his uncanny ability to pick out the jewels among irreparable and worthless old movements, came across this one and thought it perfect for the collaboration. He refurbished it, then handed it over to Benzinger for the perfect finish-

ing touches. The result is no less than stunning, with the swan-neck spring and screw balance perfectly showcased among the guilloché bridges and wheels and the hand-engraved balance cock.

The second piece to emerge from the collaboration features an IWC Caliber 97. Though vintage IWC calibers abound on the antique market, it is not always easy to find the rare ones, as this one from the early 1900s will attest. Extensive restoration of each individual component of the 4.3 mm high movement preceded Benzinger's attention to it, which has turned it into one of the most unique pieces on today's market. Exhaustive guilloché on both sides gives it a completely unique character. The front of the watch has been left without a dial to better showcase the underside of the base plate, which Benz-

This ETA Unitas 6498 is barely recognizable as such after Benzinger gets through with it.



The second Grieb & Benzinger to be offered by WatchBuys features a vintage IWC Caliber 97.

inger has turned into a work of art. Blued Breguet hands stand out from the warm geometrical landscape of silver and copper hues to give the lucky owner the current time.

The manufacture of these pieces depends highly on the movements that Grieb finds. The length of time needed for their refurbishment and decoration cannot be determined in advance. Therefore, the clever collector should check back with WatchBuys often to see what the two masters have come up with next. One thing is for certain: a vintage three-handed movement with a flying spring barrel by Vacheron Constant was under construction in Grieb's workshop at press time and could well show up at WatchBuys soon.

The owner of a Grieb & Benzinger can look forward to receiving the new acquisition in a beautiful wood box with an engraved plate befitting the importance of the piece he or she has purchased. And typical of the personalities of these two low-

key masters of their crafts, a personal hand-written note is included.

Benzinger

A second line has emerged at WatchBuys that is of a more serial nature than the Grieb & Benzingers, if work done by hand in such small quantities can be termed "serial" at all.

The first Benzinger model features a new old stock P.U.W. 660 movement from Pforzheim. The solid silver dial is a true Benzinger creation in the style of the old masters. Completely hand-guilloch , it may be reminiscent of an old Breguet piece, but this is only because one of Breguet's hallmark elements was the guilloch  dial. In stark contrast to other ways of achieving this look today (machine stamping, pantograph, CNC), this is completely done by hand by Benzinger.

The second watch runs on an ETA Unitas 6498, a movement that was originally created for use in pocket watches. It is one beautifully suited to today's trend toward larger watches – and to being decorated thanks to its expansive bridges. Therefore, it stands to great reason that this is a movement that Benzinger transforms into something unique and beautiful within the walls of his Pforzheim workshop.

Skeletonizing, tempering, engraving, guilloch : Like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon, when these movements leave Benzinger's workshop, they are hardly recognizable again. One bridge's red bear-



WatchBuys first sold this unique Grieb & Benzinger with a vintage Record movement.

ing jewels are embroidered into an engraved leaf pattern making the metal seem almost floral. A blued and skeletonized gear wheel is almost unrecognizable as such. And – one of Benzinger's hallmark elements – the underside of the base plate has been so decorated that it would be an absolute shame to cover it with a dial; it is left to the transparency of a sapphire crystal plate and blued Breguet hands. The subsidiary seconds at 6 o'clock typical of this hunter movement are set off with a copper-colored segment and a small blued hand that do not disturb the "dial's" geometric beauty in the least. "People need to realize that there is such a thing as an artist actually making these timepieces. This is not done by machine. The average watch fan might have a hard time telling the difference between hand guilloch  and stamping at first, but we are here to educate them," says Rob Hickson of WatchBuys.

"I don't know where else you'd get this type of timepiece – there's only one Jochen Benzinger. And it's high time his work began to be introduced under his own name." ☺

For more information about watches from Jochen Benzinger and Hermann Grieb, visit www.watchbuys.com, or call toll-free (888) 333-4895.



This Benzinger watch features the beautifully decorated base plate of the ETA Unitas 6498 as the dial.