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The "Mother of all Sothis watches" was created to be the "last watch" in Wolfgang Steinkrüger's private collection.



BY ELIZABETH DOERR

# Details of a Starry Sky

German brand Sothis masters color and geometry to spice up its unique chronographs

Sothis's unique feel for color and shape all started with this moon phase display.



The Spirit of Moon chronograph runs on a modified ETA Valjoux 7750.

**Details.** These are the thoughts that occupy Wolfgang Steinkrüger for most of his waking hours. Details.

Putting together a beautiful timepiece, attractive and completely reliable at the same time, is no mean feat. And probably less easy when you're a German manufacturer living high in the north and not a Swiss national with easy access.

Steinkrüger, who hails from Bielefeld, loves his details, and it is these details that make up the strong character of his watches. Unlike a lot of the manufacturers active in his price segment, Steinkrüger doesn't just go shopping at well-known Swiss suppliers for off-the-rack components.

As a matter of fact, he rarely goes shopping in Switzerland.

All the parts of a Sothis watch except for two are purchased in Germany. Dials from Eimeldingen, cases from Pforzheim, straps from Grenderich...the list goes on, a list that oozes the quality that German manufacturing brings.

What Steinkrüger does buy in Switzerland are hands and movements. While the latter needs almost no explanation, the manufacture and acquisition of hands may need some. This is a sore point in the production of watches for many manufacturers. There are just too few suppliers for the demand that is currently clamoring to be met. Above and beyond that, Steinkrüger's hands are difficult to make, including unusual shapes and lengths, best exemplified by the hour-cum-minute hand visible on the new Horus model.

## Once Upon a Time

Steinkrüger is a self-professed watch nut who was educated in classic product design. He taught himself watchmaking skills, continually contacting approachable watchmakers such as Paul Gerber and Svend Andersen for tips and tricks of the trade. Then he began to make what he thought would be the "last" watch in his collection.

"Everything on this watch, which I call the 'mother of all



Wolfgang Steinkrüger is meanwhile assisted by his daughter Karina.

Sothis watches,' is made by hand: the platinum case, some hands, most especially the moon phase hand, and so on. I reworked an old Valjoux 88 with 18,000 bph for its movement. This is a watch I will never sell," he reveals.

Inspiration for the discreet use of color that has become a Sothis hallmark was a result of the moon phase timepiece Steinkrüger developed in 1996, still unique in his collection.

"The moon phase function, something that we continue to manufacture more and more of ourselves, was supposed to clearly differentiate itself from the background color of the dial. For that reason I used the colors red and yellow in 1996, in order to achieve a visual separation of the individual displays such as the date hand and the moon phase. I still use the star-tipped, snake-shaped moon phase hand with the exhibition circle on the other side to this day in those same colors."

In addition to brighter colors, the other definitive Sothis hallmark is the use of unusual shapes on the dial and hands – with a case in point being the new double-sided pointer that Steinkrüger designed

especially for the Horus. This single-handed model cleverly shows the time and whether it's currently day or night on a 24-hour dial.

"The little hands of that first moon phase already had the little Sothis star as a counterbalance, and the stop-second hand with the same exhibition circle as the moon phase hand underscores my attention to detail. Therefore, the exhibition circle on both of these hands is exactly the same size as the full moon symbol. In this way, I retained the basic criteria of my dial design, which was never to hide anything on the dial with the hands. Even the numerals, be they Roman or Arabic, are never cut off by the hands as far as possible. I find hiding or arbitrarily cutting off parts of numerals so unaesthetic."

### Minimalist Phase

Steinkrüger left his playful, colorful watches behind him in 2002 upon introducing two new Spirit of Moon Prestige models. These two ETA Valjoux 7751-run chronographs were more elegant in their intention, their dials available in either grey or black, lavish dials the likes of which are seldom seen with seventy-four elements applied by hand.

"Even more elegant was the Prestige version of our Ikarus, which came out in 2005. Its twenty-four rays of guilloché spring from the center of the moon phase display like a rising sun. This model also features blued steel, applied el-

ements, and only the moon phase hand still bears the original shape and colors of the 1997 models."

Underscoring this new minimalism, Steinkrüger went straight into a black/white phase that began in 2004 as reflected in the bicompass Janus, tricompax Libra, and another Spirit of Moon version called Osiris, which is a complete calendar featuring luminous markers and hands.

The new Horus model, the world's only chronograph to show the time with just one single hand, is currently crowning this Sothis epoch. In a twenty-four hour period, this sole hand makes a complete rotation around the dial, with the stylized star showing the night hours and the sun on the other side symbolizing the waking day hours.

"The semicircular scale is set up in increments of five minutes, with the result that the time can be read from it within two to three



The high quality of Sothis's movement finish and Canis Major are easily seen through the transparent case back.



The new Horus model is available in two dial variations, each limited to 200 pieces each.

minutes,” Steinkrüger says of the newest addition to the Sothis fold. “All of this is combined with the perfection of the chronograph display, which creates the somewhat anachronistic charm of this unique timekeeper. This is a watch with real style, for people who love special things.”

Steinkrüger underscores the fact that the timepiece’s mechanical base ETA Valjoux 7750 is modified by hand in Sothis’s Bielefeld workshop – mainly by master watchmaker Ralf Haselhorst, who literally has his hands full with the limited series of 200 in each dial color.

### Egypt?

The word Sothis itself originates in Egyptian mythology. Sothis was the personification of the Star of Sirius. For the Egyptians, the ap-

pearance of this star in the winter sky was a good omen meaning that the Nile would flood and that nothing could stand in the way of a good harvest.

Why did Steinkrüger choose this word as the name for his new hobby-turned-serious-brand?

“One winter I was casting around for a name for my brand. I had many names written down on my flip chart, but it was supposed to be a name with its own story. I didn’t want to buy an old brand name with historical meaning in Switzerland like so many have already done for the bragging rights of having been founded in 1856 or whatever. I was still missing just the right name, however. In such situations, things often happen quite accidentally.

“During late-evening walks with my two dogs, I always noticed a certain star in the night sky, large and unmistakable. This star shone like a pure white twenty-carat diamond. What star was that? I quickly found out it was Sirius, located within the constellation Canis Major. And I found it with my dogs—what a coincidence! The name Sirius had already been registered in France for a watch brand. An Internet search brought me to Sothis, an ancient Egyptian goddess. Sirius was in the same constellation, just under a different name.

“What else could I want? Now I had a name that is pronounced well in almost every language, and the story surrounding the name is inexhaustible,” Steinkrüger recalls. He has remained true to form, christening many of his creations with names originating in Egypt’s colorful mythology, though he hasn’t shied away from other classical mythologies either in searching out unique model names.

### Ten Years

All Sothis movements feature a rotor engraved with the Canis Major constellation, a set of stars that has undoubtedly brought Steinkrüger some luck. This constellation looks out from the dial of Sothis’s Stardust model as well. The one-handed Horus – like the Egyptian god it was named for – is undoubtedly ruling the roost this year at Sothis with its unusual visuals.

Next year Sothis celebrates a decade of success in the watch industry, though it’s going to be hard to imagine what Steinkrüger might dream up to please the horology gods. ☺



Wolfgang Steinkrüger, a self-taught watchmaker.