

TIME ZONE

We visit Glashütte, the birthplace of Germany's watchmaking industry

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GLASHÜTTE

WATCH BRANDS: 13

POPULATION: 5,000

**WATCH COMPANY
EMPLOYEES: 1,100**



HOT TYPE

The 'Tangomat GMT' is a larger model of the 'Tangente', which was inspired by a German-made 1930s watch belonging to founder Roland Schwertner



Watches crafted in the German town of Glashütte – which include the revered A Lange & Söhne and Glashütte Original marques (owned by Richemont and Swatch Group respectively) – can claim to be some of the finest in the world. In fact, such is the quality of the horological output of the biscuit-tin town in the east German enclave of Saxony, that it has been deemed a protected designated origin for the production of watches by the EU.

Nomos watches are the timepieces of choice for architects and graphic designers, and although they are designed in Berlin, the brand is keen to show off the fact that its production facilities are based in this small Saxon town. The whole point of a decent watch is that it should have properly crafted mechanical inner workings because, as Marc Newson once said: 'It's like having a miniature universe strapped to your wrist.' Precise engineering, then, is paramount and so most Nomos movements and parts are developed or made in Glashütte.

The brand can't claim that 100 per cent of its watch components are made there, but then most of the world's top watch names would struggle to claim that they make everything on site (hands, for instance, are generally outsourced), so in this instance, Nomos is not unusual.

But its approach to watchmaking is. For while it may adhere to all the craft of horological tradition, a highly considered design ethos is what really drives Nomos. The existence of the brand, which was set up by the West German entrepreneur

Roland Schwertner two months after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1990, is centred around the philosophy of the Deutscher Werkbund (German Work Federation). The movement was a precursor to the Bauhaus, and was set up in 1907 by a group of artists, architects and business firms in Munich - Ludwig Mies van der Rohe would join later as architectural director. The Werkbund was established in response to the proliferation of cheap, mass production of housing and furniture. It aimed to show that industrialisation did not need to be deficient in craftsmanship to be economically viable. The Werkbund still exists today and, alongside Nomos, counts Vitra and the specialist interior architects Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau as members.

As if to prove the point, Karen Siebert, one of Nomos' chief designers, is from an industrial-design rather than a watchmaking background. Her 'Tangente' design - the brand's core watch - has been garlanded with plaudits. Last year it received the Good Design Award from the Chicago Athenaeum Museum of Architecture and Design, and this year an iF (International Forum) design award.

'I love the aura of a mechanical watch, the way it mechanically divides days into hours, minutes and seconds, it's alive,' says the designer from the Nomos design studios in Glashütte. But what of her

SECOND SIGHT

Above left, a traditional Glashütte building forms part of Nomos' production facilities and also includes a small, on-site shop

Above right, Karen Siebert, chief designer of the 'Tangente' watch

mammoth decision to switch from the large scale to the comparatively miniscule? 'Product and graphic design meet in watch design: dials are two-dimensional, for instance, while cases are 3D. My role begins when the technical details have been agreed, so I focus on proportion, material and colour.'

But it's not only Siebert's dedication to creating affordable, mechanical watches suited to contemporary tastes that is adding to Nomos' growing awards list. The success of her designs is also reflected in the growth of the company, a relatively small player in the world watch scene.

Germans have taken to wearing Nomos watches - the Glashiitte manufacturer increased its staff by 20 per cent in 2011, and a further 10 per cent in 2012, while the workforce at the Nomos design and export subsidiary in Berlin has risen from five to 25 in just over a year. But any growth industry needs a global strategy, so being cherished on your home turf will never be enough to sustain even the most boutique enterprise. 'Right now we're seeing growth that's unusual even for us, domestically and internationally,' says Nomos executive director Uwe Ahrendt.

To that effect, the firm is getting ready to launch business operations in the USA. And the only thing that looks set to hinder its ambition is the one faced by every top brand that has to factor in time as an essential quality component-supply. More than anything Nomos needs more watches. 'Yes, watches, watches, watches,' smiles its founder.

'Product and graphic design meet in a watch. Dials are 2D, while cases are 3D'