I. INTRODUCTION

In all our contemporary creations we draw on the exceptional legacy we have inherited, ensuring it is passed on to future generations.

We are the beneficiaries of an extraordinary inheritance which has been handed down from generation to generation ever since 1747, the year when Basile Le Roy began his apprenticeship with Sr. Quentin, master watchmaker in Paris.

More than 250 years later, it is a unique experience to delve into the company’s archives, gently turning pages that are yellow with time and black with the ink of painstaking quills, staying late to read or decipher the names of thousands of clients who were often famous and powerful, always sensitive and passionate.

Here we can see that the company’s workshops, officially installed in the arcades of the Palais-Royal in 1785, have written some of the most beautiful pages in the history of French watchmaking and timekeeping, drawing deeply on the passion of two dynasties of craftsmen whose genius has been inspired as much by the applied arts as by science.

Today, in the era of “time-frequency” with civil and military telecommunications controlled by powerful atomic clocks that measure time to the nanosecond (one billionth of a second), it might seem ridiculous to pore over these archives and study our past, were it not for the fact that we uncover traces and descriptions of the period which are used by our authentification service in issuing its certificates.

And yet...
A priceless inheritance

The largest part of the Leroy company archives is devoted to a collection of sales records which include most of the pieces delivered to our clients since the start of the 19th century. A quick, incomplete count estimates that close to 400,000 sales are recorded here covering some 200 years of continuous operations.

A significant number of drawings, plans, orders to suppliers, maintenance records and other original documents such as chronometry certificates and various pieces of correspondence complete the rich resource of our archive of papers.

In view of the inestimable value of this historical record, in 2009 a team of 15 people was devoted to scanning all the archives to create a complete digital record. After 8 months of daily work this mountainous task has been completed and our company is now able to issue fully documented certificates of authenticity using a secure data base, which guarantees the conservation of our inherited treasure “in perpetuity.”

The Leroy Museum Collection

The collection is a source of wonder and endless inspiration, displaying some of the most beautiful pieces the company has ever produced. Here you can find the signature of each epoch, of all the styles and all the “Le Roy” and later “Leroy” pieces that defined the legend. At first it’s the technical quality, the attention to detail and the insistence on the highest aesthetic standards that emerge most strongly from the collection (a synthesis of all the knowledge, and all the artistic and technical skills developed in measuring time since the middle of the 18th century.) Then it’s the names of the owners, private and corporate, demonstrating the links between the company and its prestigious, faithful clients who ensured the extraordinary expansion of “L.Leroy” watchmaker de luxe and master of extreme precision.

As “guardians of the temple” we manage our regular acquisitions with one simple aim: to put this multi-century expertise in the spotlight once again by preserving it with our restorations and displaying it in our programme of exhibitions. The 150 reference pieces on display illustrate all the themes in the company’s history: from watchmaking for the royal court to timekeepers for Napoleon’s military campaigns, from the discreet luxury of the Empire period to the ultra-complications of the twentieth century, from high-precision scientific instruments to marine chronometers and, of course, the spread of the wristwatch as it became the sophisticated yet practical jewellery of the "crazy twenties."
We must not forget that, at the start of the Century of Light, the era of royal watchmakers, Julien, then Pierre Le Roy, Harrison, Berthoud, Breguet and many others established the principles of accurate mechanical measurement of time. These principles, developed and tested in the 18th century, enabled the house of “Le Roy & Fils” to expand its range of products, its service, its distribution and its clientele from Paris to Buenos Aires, Madrid and London. In 1900, when the Leroy 01 was presented at the Paris Universal Exhibition, the Leroy name took its place in the galaxy of exceptional brands and the company gained a reputation for excellence that it has preserved ever since.

Now installed opposite the Elysée Palace in the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré, it relies on its workshops in Besançon and its close co-operation with the national observatory to continue its pursuit of excellence in chronometry. With a harvest of gold medals and first-class certificates to its name, L.Leroy equips an impressive number of military and merchant fleets, although never neglecting its prestigious clients in the major European cities.

Our philosophy is clear: it is by respecting and learning from our past that we build our future, recognising that the present day is tomorrow’s history. With this in mind, everyone at L.Leroy draws on our legacy every day, passing its riches to future generations through our current creations and collections.

Dear friends and enthusiasts, collectors and clients, you are an invaluable part of this history and of our present, for which we offer our sincerest thanks.

Montres L.Leroy
Société Anonyme
In 1784, Philippe IV of Orleans authorised the opening of the Palais-Royal to the public and to commerce. One year later, the young (Basile)-Charles Le Roy, who had become a Master Watchmaker, joined with his father to set up his workshop and boutique.

1785. Official opening of the company which remained at the same address for more than a century.
Basile Le Roy (1731 - † the year XI)
The origins of the first dynasty

The 18th century was a time of extraordinary discoveries. Scientists, philosophers, artists and scholars of all kinds exchanged their ideas and presented their results, bringing about an incredible change in the way that European society viewed and understood the world. France and England, led by their crowned heads, played the leading roles in this profound evolution, attracting the greatest talents in each discipline. In 1747, swept along in the torrent of new ideas, a 16-year-old and his mother arrived at the workshop of Sr. Joseph Quétin, Master Watchmaker in the Paris corporation. His name was Basile Le Roy and, with the backing of Pierre Le Roy, he signed an 8-year contract of apprenticeship, probably never imagining that he would be at the start of one of the most important and prestigious stories in watchmaking history.

Founders of the legend
Julien and Pierre Le Roy, global icons of French prestige watchmaking.

Basile was the son of a forester and had no connections to the watchmaking world, but his family name already had its place among watchmakers of genius thanks to Julien Le Roy (1686-1759) and his son Pierre (1717 – 1785). Both were royal watchmakers who were firmly established as two of the greatest figures in French and European horology. Julien was renowned for his commitment to absolute precision, as well as for several achievements which included perfecting the first watch to indicate seconds. He is also credited with managing to combine the rival watchmaking cultures of France and England. His son Pierre is considered one of the fathers of modern chronometry and his work influenced the key developments in the race between European monarchies to master the art of timekeeping at sea. This was a critical matter since it would enable the accurate determination of longitude and greatly improve the safety of ships and their cargoes which often had a value that is unimaginable today.
Large “Empire” pocket watch in gold, strikes the quarters on two gongs if pendant is pressed. Signed Le Roy – Au Palais-Royal 13 & 14, N° 4915. Made between 1795 and 1800.
Collection: L. Leroy Museum
(previously Léon Leroy collection)

Large “Empire” pocket watch in silver, automatic winding, displays perpetual seconds, date, and power reserve. Signed Le Roy – A Paris, N° 2216. Made between 1795 and 1800.
Collection: L. Leroy Museum

(Basile)-Charles Le Roy is the watchmaker who founded the current company. He was declared “Master Watchmaker” in 1785 at the very young age of 20. This gave him the right to open an official workshop and boutique, which he did in that same year with the help of his father, within the Palais-Royal which had recently been opened to businesses. Towards 1790, when France was in a revolutionary turmoil, the overtones of royalty in his name and his commercial links to the monarchy led him to sign his work with the anagram “Elyor” in order to avoid the vengeance that republicans were inflicting on those who had been suppliers to the King and the court. During the “Reign of Terror” in 1793, (Basile)-Charles even sold the company fictitiously to a certain Cachard, an employee, and bought it back it after Thermidor. From 1794, when revolutionary fever began to subside rapidly, the new powerful figures in the capital began to recognise the quality of his timepieces. The Palais-Royal became a favourite place for political discussion and the exchange of ideas. The last 5 years of the century definitively confirmed his reputation. He returned to using “Le Roy” to sign his new creations, which were strongly influenced by Abraham-Louis Breguet, and he displayed his work at the Paris Exhibition of 1798 (the year VI).
Pierre had become a much admired President of the Paris Corporation and, although he was a very private man, he enjoyed a great reputation. At the end of his life in 1776, he was granted a comfortable annual pension by Louis XVI (then a young monarch fascinated by watches and locks) as compensation for the considerable sums he had invested in his research and the 20 years he had devoted to developing his famous marine chronometers.

We are not going to list all the inventions, research and creations that Pierre completed, but to position the man in his times and understand the importance of the “Le Roy” signature in the tiny world of famous watchmakers, here is a line from a tribute written by Ferdinand Berthoud in 1802: “He was the most illustrious of all the watchmakers who have honoured or enriched France”. The annals of French horology record an impressive number of watchmakers with the names “Le Roy” or “LeRoy”.

There were dozens of them in the 18th and 19th centuries. Our company claims no direct link with the most famous Le Roy (Julien and Pierre). However, a shared technical heritage and the handing down of expertise often seem undeniable, particularly in view of the close relations that existed between members of the corporation. The signature of Pierre Le Roy at the bottom of Basile’s apprenticeship contract (carefully preserved in our archives) is strong evidence.

To complete this little history: Pierre died, without descendants, in 1785, the year that (Basile)-Charles founded the Le Roy company in the “Galerie de Pierre” of the Palais-Royal.
This piece was produced for Prince Emil Maximillian Leopold August de Hesse who wished to present it as a gift. It carries a particular dedication engraved, then enamelled, on the back cover: “Donné par Emile”

This type of timepiece is called “à tact” because it allows the wearer to read the time (to the nearest quarter of an hour) discreetly, or during the night, by feeling the point of the arrow with the fingertips.
III.
THE AGE OF SPLENDOUR

Often viewed as the brand of kings and crowned heads of the 18th century, the company’s fame increased dramatically in the next century, initially in France and then around the world. In 1805, Le Roy was named “Watchmaker to Her Imperial and Royal Highness, Madame the Mother of the Emperor”. Close to Napoleon and his family, (Basile)-Charles produced very high quality watches, traditional or decimal, chiming or “à tact”.

As 1810 approached, increasing orders from the army led to the production of more officers’ watches than pocket watches and, to meet the demand, the company was forced to collaborate with other workshops in the French Jura and Switzerland. National exhibitions in 1819, 1823 and 1827 established the reputation of the prestigious “little” company in the Palais-Royal, which had been installed for almost 45 years in the Galerie Montpensier and was now directed by Charles-Louis Le Roy (son of Basile-Charles).

Very much in vogue after the revolution, Le Roy became one of the leading companies in Paris for the production of clocks and carriage clocks, chiefly intended for officers in the Napoleonic campaigns. (Basile)-Charles Le Roy inevitably became “Watchmaker to the Emperor” (Napoleon 1st” recently consecrated in the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris) as well as “Watchmaker to Madame Mother” (Napoleon’s mother), “Watchmaker to the King of Westphalia” (Jérôme Bonaparte, Napoleon’s brother) and even “Watchmaker to the Princess Pauline” (Napoleon’s sister).
Officer’s alarm clock in gilded brass, chiming quarters with two hammers on a single gong.
Dial signed Le Roy – Horloger de S. Mte. le Roi de Westphalie, à Paris.
Made around 1810.

Collection: L.Leroy Museum
1828: Charles-Louis joined his father in a flourishing company that became “Le Roy & Fils”. Watchmaker to the Dukes of Chartres and Bourbon, then watchmaker to the King and the Duke of Orleans, and watchmaker to the Ministry of the Navy from 1835, Le Roy & Fils developed on every level. From 1840, the manufacture of pocket watches recovered and the company’s production returned to equilibrium. This broader range of production, a new energy and the success of ideas introduced into the workshops by Charles-Louis soon attracted the finest craftsmen. Notable among them was Adrien Philippe who left his mark on the company before returning to Geneva to join forces with Mr. Patek.

1854: “Le Roy & Sons” was set up in London and set the watchmaking standard for the British monarchy. The business was well managed and employed no fewer than 50 permanent staff during the 1840s. One of them, Casimir Halley Desfontaines, a talented and far-sighted entrepreneur, offered to buy the company from Charles-Louis whose two children have no interest in watchmaking. In 1845 the sale took place but only on condition that the name “Le Roy & Sons” was retained for at least two generations. Casimir Halley Desfontaines applied for a host of patents, including a revolutionary idea for an electromagnetic clock, unveiled for the first time at the Paris exhibition of 1855. The company also used the occasion to present watches that were rewound without a key, based on an invention of Adrien Philippe.

Throughout the first half of the 19th century, the workshops in the Palais-Royal continually increased the complexity of its timepieces, reinforcing a reputation for excellence that had become international. In 1850 Le Roy & Sons employed almost 50 people in its Paris workshops and opened its first boutique in London.

Collection: L Leroy Museum
CHAPTER III.

Watchmaker to Queen Victoria

The company's first London boutique was opened in 1854 and enjoyed great success under its manager who was well known to the London upper classes and reputed to be close to the queen herself. Shortly afterwards, a second boutique was opened in New Bond Street. Customized and “For the Queen” creations followed one after another and secured for “Le Roy & Sons” an unprecedented opportunity: to become Watchmaker to the Queen, officially appointed by the monarch. Some years later, the Emperor of Brazil, followed by Queen Isabelle II of Spain, similarly honoured our company. Le Roy & Fils was present at all the national and European exhibitions, from Madrid to Vienna, London and Paris, collecting prizes, an impressive number of medals for progress, gold medals and other distinctions.

The success of the first Le Roy & Sons London boutique led the company to open a second at 57 New Bond Street and it remained an exclusive meeting place for English lovers of fine watchmaking until 1952.

Officially appointed Watchmaker to Queen Victoria in 1863 (a great honour at that time for any foreign company, particularly a French one), Le Roy & Sons delivered a large number of unique pieces to the court engraved “For the Queen”. The piece shown here was specially designed to hold an enamel miniature portrait painted in the 17th century by Jean Petitot, a famous Geneva artist and enameller, when he was working for King Charles 1st at the English court. It is also interesting to note that this is one of the earliest known ladies’ bracelet pieces in the world of watchmaking.
Louis Leroy, a genius watchmaker appears at the crossroads of all knowledge. Born in 1859 in Argenteuil, the eldest son in a family of 14 children, he soon became familiar with the art of precision watchmaking. His father, Théodore-Marie Leroy, was well known as a maker of chronometers, Watchmaker to the Navy and a member of the Légion d’Honneur. He employed Louis in the workshops where he quickly became the best of apprentices. When he was barely 16 years old he presented a piece that attracted great attention at the competition of the Paris Chamber of Watchmakers, and by the age of 20 he was an approved watchmaker. He spent a year in England, training under a manufacturer in Clerkenwell shortly after the London Universal Exhibition, and soon gained a reputation for being talented and ambitious with a fiercely enquiring mind. Casimir Halley Desfontaines recognized his ability and employed him at Le Roy & Sons, and soon afterwards in the Paris workshops. This was the dawn of a new era in society and the start of the company’s period of absolute excellence.

“Le Roy & Fils” becomes “L.Leroy & Cie”.

Louis’s relationship with the Desfontaines family soon developed into a close friendship. When Casimir died, his son George took over the business, but his reliance on the expert advice of Leroy meant that it was he who emerged as the real leader. He became a partner in the business in 1888 and took it over completely one year later, changing the name to “L.Leroy & Cie, ancienne maison Le Roy & Fils”. From 1895 onwards, the company archives only refer to the name “L.Leroy & Cie”.

Start of the company’s period of absolute excellence

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Collection: L.Leroy Museum
CHAPTER IV.

LEROY O1

For almost a century,
the most complicated watch in the world

The “Leroy 01”, a true global icon and winner of the Grand Prix at the Paris Universal Exhibition, was presented to the jury by Louis Leroy in 1900. It remained the absolute standard for highly complicated watchmaking until 1989 when the famous Geneva manufacturer, Patek Philippe introduced its “Calibre 89”. For nine decades this watch was the symbol of the company’s technical expertise. But, more than that, it demonstrated the wealth of craftsmanship that existed at the start of the 20th century in the Besançon area and the nearby Jura region of Switzerland.

Its movement containing 975 parts was conceived and developed with the expertise of a famous watchmaker from Le Brassus in the Vallée de Joux, Charles Piguet, who produced the “ébauche”. This was completed, decorated, assembled and adjusted in the L.Leroy workshops located in the magnificent Square St. Amour in Besançon. In recognition of the many people who worked for seven years to make this unique project a success, we always describe the piece as having “a French father and a Swiss mother.”

The Leroy 01 (called “La Lucie” in Besançon) is at the heart of the collection in the city’s Museum of Time within the beautiful Palais Granvelle.

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<th>Displayed information (complications)</th>
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<td>These do not include hours and minutes, which L.Leroy considered as basic functions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1  Day of the week</td>
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<td>26 12 signs of the zodiac, on the case</td>
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The history of the famous Leroy 01 began in 1867 when the company arrived at an exhibition with an extraordinary timepiece that incorporated 9 complications. This unique watch so impressed the exclusive circle of international collectors that Count Nicolas Nostitz of Moscow commissioned the Paris workshops to produce an even more amazing piece with 11 complications. The company rose to the challenge and, before being delivered to Russia, the watch was shown at the Universal Exhibition of 1878. Upon the death of the Count in 1896, it was acquired by a famous Portuguese collector, Dr Antonio Augusto de Carvalho Monteiro, a demanding man who believed it should be possible to add even more complications. He sent Louis Leroy a long list of requests that he summarized as follows: “Create a watch that brings together in one portable timepiece all that science and mechanics can currently achieve.” After seven years of work, Louis Leroy delivered the final piece to the King of Portugal, a faithful client of the company, when he was on a royal visit to Paris. A few days later, Doctor de Carvalho Monteiro was summoned to the Lisbon Palace where he received this amazing object from the hands of his King.
CHAPTER V.

THE PERIOD OF EXCELLENCE

From Champ-de-Mars to the Square St. Amour

The universal exhibition commemorating the centenary of the Revolution was full to overflowing. Visitors from all over Europe were astounded to discover a Paris that was bursting with life, completely transformed by Baron Haussman and which had become the world capital of fashion and luxury. France's supremacy in industry, technology and the arts was made obvious in extraordinary achievements such as the Eiffel Tower.

In 1889, the young Louis Leroy became the owner of a 100-year-old company known throughout Europe for the quality of its creations. Having travelled extensively and kept closely in touch with international affairs, he knew that the Swiss were making pieces that surpassed the precision of those produced in France. He therefore decided to move closer to the Jura region, the heart of Swiss watchmaking, and set up close collaboration between the Vallée de Joux and Le Locle.

Top-quality movement blanks and escapements, occasionally completed mechanisms, were purchased here from the best workshops, to be decorated, assembled and adjusted in Paris. But it was a long way between Paris and the Jura and it soon became essential to set up a workshop closer to Switzerland. Naturally enough, it was Besançon, the “Heart and soul” of French watchmaking, that Louis selected. In 1892, the “Ateliers L.Leroy” were opened in the historical heart of the city that had recently acquired an important new installation: the National Observatory and its Chronometry Certification Service.

From the Palais-Royal to Hausmann’s grand boulevards

new temples to the business of luxury.

Léon Leroy, Louis’s youngest brother became an associate of the company in 1895. His arrival allowed Louis to complete his reorganisation of the workforce and in 1899, he amalgamated the production workshops of his father who had recently died. The company had outstanding capacities in research, development and production and was collaborating with some of the leading talents in Swiss watchmaking, notably Louis-Benjamin Audemars and Charles Piguet. All that was missing now was a Paris “shop window” worthy of its considerable ambitions.

The habits of wealthy, cosmopolitan clients were changing and now they were to be found almost exclusively on the broad boulevards of the capital. Consequently, in 1899 L.Leroy & Cie set up its workshops and boutique at no. 7 Boulevard de la Madeleine.
The Period of excellence

This piece perfectly represents the L.Leroy company philosophy of offering its demanding clients products that reflect excellence at every level. In 1929 this “Grande Complication” was given a first-class report from the Besançon Observatory that officially certified its time-keeping performance.

Exceptional single push-button chronograph in gold, perpetual calendar with moon phases, minutes repeater, certified first-class chronometer by Besançon Observatory. Back cover signed L.Leroy & Cie, Horlogers de la Marine, Boulevard de la Madeleine – Paris, N°18486. Ordered from the workshops in October 1927 and delivered in March 1929 to the Comte de Pierredon.

Collection: L.Leroy Museum

Prestigious clients and passionate connoisseurs

The company’s rich, demanding clients were both prestigious and faithful, and they supported its extraordinary growth throughout the first half of the 20th century, confirming the reputation of L.Leroy & Cie as creators of excellence. Today, it’s a dizzying experience to look through the order books and delivery notes that record all the pieces created and the names of the buyers. Just like the crowned heads and grand European families of the 19th century, the leading artists, industrialists, politicians, philosophers and adventurers of the 20th century have been clients, and sometimes close friends, of the Leroy’s. It would virtually impossible to list all the famous figures who patronised the company over more than two centuries but here, in no particular order, are some of the names that spring off the page:

Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States, Alfred Nobel, billionaire chemist, inventor of dynamite and founder of the Nobel Prizes, Antoine de St. Exupéry, Jules Védrines, Lindbergh and Alberto Santos-Dumont, pioneers of aviation and extraordinary adventurers, Louis Renault, Delahaye and Ettore Bugatti, iconic motor manufacturers, Frédéric Chopin, Strauss and Wagner, Gabriel Fauré and Debussy, romantics and composers of genius, George Sand, the passionate writer, Alfred de Musset, the celebrated poet and romantic playwright, Marcel Proust, author of A la recherche du temps perdu, Henri Matisse, painter, sculptor, tireless traveller and leader of the Fauvism movement…
"L.Leroy & Cie" nursery of innovation, development and collaboration.

The widespread astonishment created by the Leroy 01 in 1900 meant that company could view its future with confidence. Firmly established as the standard for French luxury watchmaking, the brand turned its attention to developing scientific, military, industrial and sports timing, making decisive advances in each of these areas. In 1910, resulting from a collaboration with Captain Ferrié and the Paris Observatory, Leroy installed the first system for transmitting time signals by radio telegraphy at the top of the Eiffel Tower. It broadcast the national reference time signal over a distance of 6000 km in every direction. The system was driven by a mother clock called a “constant-pressure regulator” perfected by Leroy. Achieving a precision of 100th of a second, protected by heavy glass jars and lowered into wells 25 metres deep to avoid vibrations, these time-measuring machines were the most precise and stable that man had ever produced. In the 1920s they became the basis of the reference time used by the majority of national observatories around the world from China to the USA, including Switzerland.

Far from concentrating exclusively on scientific advances in the measurement of time, L.Leroy & Cie applied for a large number of patents relating to traditional movements used in pocket and wrist watches. For example, this piece with its unusual shape is the first ever automatic-rewinding wristwatch. Its immediate success ensured that it appeared in all the company’s catalogues for the next ten years. Several different versions were produced but all were recognisable by the shape, named “Marquise.”

John Harwood, who for many years was wrongly credited with inventing this type of watch, applied for an official Swiss patent in 1923 for his automatic movement with a central oscillating weight. Series production only started in 1926, four years after the first models sold by L.Leroy.
The Period of excellence

This on-board chronometer is typical of the timepieces produced for military and merchant ships, and is a perfect example of the most precise navigational instrument available in the first half of the 20th century. The title of “Watchmaker to the Navy” was the equivalent of a certificate of supreme mastery in the measurement of time. At first it was conferred by the Kings, then by the State, to the greatest watchmakers such as Berthoud, Abraham-Louis Breguet, Henry Motel... In this firmament of genius that left an indelible mark on the history of precision timekeeping, it was Leroy who held this prestigious title for the longest period. The excellence of Leroy timepieces was recognised with no fewer than 349 medals from the Observatory of Besançon, a record that stands to this day.


Collection: L.Leroy Museum
With the same devotion to high precision, the Besançon workshops produced an important number of small certified chronometers, mainly intended for the European navies (merchant and military) but also for companies of all kinds and sports federations. Up to the 1950s, more than 1200 certified chronometers were signed by Leroy and some of them achieved results that have never been equalled in the famous international competitions organised in Paris, Geneva, Greenwich, Besançon and Neuchâtel. Chronometry cups, gold medals and first-class certificates followed one after another. They earned the company a privileged position in the world of sport, becoming official supplier to the majority of automobile clubs, flying clubs, as well as great events such as the legendary Tour de France.

In 1957, the invention of the “Chronostat” revolutionised the world of marine chronometry and enabled the company to conserve its dominant position in scientific and military high precision. It was Master of Time on the largest French aircraft carriers such as the “Foch” and the “Clemenceau”. During the 1980s, however, Leroy time bases were progressively replaced by atomic clocks, the only devices capable of surpassing those legendary instruments.

In 1935, the Leroy company went into mourning. Louis had died at the respectable age of 75 with no descendants, having dedicated his entire life to the arts of precision and design in luxury watchmaking. Leon was alone at the head of the company and in 1938, fulfilling his brother’s long-term vision he moved the company to 4 Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré. It was an exceptional location opposite the Elysée Palace, residence of the President of the Republic. This remained the company’s address until the 1980s when Pierre and Philippe Leroy, the sons and heirs of Léon (who died in 1961) accepted an offer for the company from a group of passionate investors who were already active in watchmaking. The new owners directed a Manufacture of mechanical movements in the Swiss Jura, specialising in the production of small series and unique pieces for major Swiss brands. It was therefore a natural decision, at the start of the 1990s, to transfer all development and production activities to Switzerland, the uncontested leader of fine traditional watchmaking whose worldwide reputation for excellence perfectly matched the ambitions of L.Leroy, S.A.
Versions I, II and III of the Chronostat systematically replaced all the traditional on-board chronometers in the navy from the end of 1950s. Pierre Leroy (Léon’s son) felt instinctively that it would not be possible to further improve the precision of the mechanical chronometers the company had been delivering to several satisfied governments for more than a century. It was not the balance regulation that needed redesigning nor the material or shape of the balance spring; it was the energy source itself. The traditional system of tension in a mainspring transmitted to a balance wheel had to be replaced. Based on this insight and inspired by the technology of electromagnetic clocks developed by Louis and Léon Leroy some years before, tests were initiated. They very quickly produced some extraordinary results. The mechanical energy was replaced by electricity and the transmission from the balance to the mechanism was now achieved by pulses regulated and calibrated by transistors. This system did away with the entire mechanical link between the balance and the rest of the movement. To ensure its perfection, the whole mechanism was produced in beryllium, making it totally insensitive to magnetic fields.

These time bases were the last evolution of marine chronometry, being progressively replaced by atomic clocks and the first systems of radio navigation (GPS). The 386 Chronostats that once equipped the most prestigious fleets of countries around the world are now highly valued collectors’ items.
Acquired in the summer of 2004 by Miguel Rodriguez, the founder and owner of a watchmaking group in the Swiss Jura, Festina-Lotus S.A., the L.Leroy brand was immediately positioned at the pinnacle of the group’s range. With this new capacity for investment and development, all the fundamentals of the famous company were examined in detail in order for them to be fully developed. While this exercise certainly included the historical elements of the company, its main focus was on the new collections, conceived and produced to attract the most demanding connoisseurs of fine neoclassical watchmaking.

The L.Leroy Manufacture

As part of the new resources made available to the company to consolidate its exclusive brand positioning, its internal development and production capacities have been reinforced by the acquisition of an independent manufacturer of movements located in the heart of the legendary Vallée de Joux. La Manufacture Horlogère de la Vallée de Joux, MHVJ S.A., produces all the components of a movement (including escapements and balances) and is now the essential asset of L.Leroy. It can equip the majority of new models with exclusive “Manufacture” calibres. With its expertise in industry and the crafts of watchmaking, L.Leroy now takes its place in the very exclusive circle of fine watchmaking brands that offer some products with movements entirely developed and produced in their own workshops.

The L.Leroy philosophy

Our philosophy focuses on a vision for the future that is based on a deep respect for its past. Driven by a fundamental devotion to excellence developed from two centuries of experience, the company strives to create timeless designs that contain the essence of all the knowledge acquired in producing superb avant-garde pieces.

Owners of a L.Leroy watch can be confident that they possess a unique, exclusive object that reflects the delicate balance between tested reliability and experimental research. It is an authentic link between the past and the future.
Chronometer certification

A small number of specialist institutions, mainly located in Switzerland, France and Germany, are qualified to issue official certificates that validate the performance of the movements submitted for testing. They include the Chronometer Certification Service of the National Observatory in Besançon. For more than 60 years, L.Leroy has had every one of its chronometers certified by this service, which is internationally recognised for its research in the field of time-frequency, and for the standardisation of French atomic clocks that are fitted, among other applications, on many European satellites. It was therefore natural for L.Leroy to choose the Besançon Observatory to carry out the certification process on all the chronometers in its new collections.

Normally, following international norms, the scientific observations of performance are carried out on the watch movement alone. After validation, it is returned to the maker, together with its certificate and a list of the measurements that have been performed. The movement is then fitted into the watch case and delivered to the market. There is, however, a risk that deregulation during assembly will affect the chronometric performance of the finished watch, even though it has been officially certified. In order to avoid this potential problem, all L.Leroy movements are “cased up” before being presented for certification. This procedure guarantees that our clients need have no doubts about the performance of their certified chronometers.

Production and assembly

Apart from their internal capacities to control quality and deliver on time, our partners and suppliers are selected for the contribution they can make to meeting a single objective: the pursuit of expertise and excellence in execution. This excludes any consideration of geography, for example a location that qualifies for the “Swiss Made” label.

It goes without saying that, that our assembly operations must be carried out in a site that meets two criteria: proximity to the Chronometry Certification Service and the expertise of local watchmakers.

It was therefore a logical decision, perfectly in line with the L.Leroy philosophy, to locate our assembly operations in Besançon, historical centre of watchmaking excellence close to the Jura region where our exclusive calibres are manufactured. This bold strategic choice firmly positions the company as the uncontested leader of fine precision watchmaking in France since 1785.
CHAPTER VII.

THE OSMIOR LINE

“OSMIOR” is the name given to an old, special metal alloy, composed principally of gold with a colour that is close to platinum. It was regularly used by the company to produce the cases of its watches with “grande complications”, and this made it a natural choice of name for the classic line in the L.Leroy collections.

The very essence of neoclassical watchmaking, the OSMIOR line perfectly encapsulates the elegance, refinement, discretion and absolute quality of the watches that we produce in very limited numbers in our workshops.

Several types of medium and advanced complications are offered in these products that eloquently express our passion for watchmaking. The automatic single push-button, column-wheel chronograph, the automatic perpetual retrograde calendar, or the automatic regulator with tourbillon are just some of the exceptional pieces in the OSMIOR line by L.Leroy.
The OSMIOR automatic regulator with tourbillon - Calibre L.512

The calibre L.512 developed and produced by our Manufac-
ture in the Vallée de Joux, is a perfect example of our vision of watchmaking, blending tradition with the avant-garde.

The flying tourbillon which regulates and transmits the energy to the drive train is literally suspended in empty space, offering an impressive, panoramic view of the heart of the movement. Comprising 61 parts compressed into a volume of 0.5 cm³ and weighing just 0.8 grams, the tourbillon completes one revolution every 60 seconds.

At a frequency of 4 HZ (28,800 vibrations per hour) it regulates the movement with a balance fitted with a double blued spring and a revolutionary "StruTech" -blanked anchor escapement in silicium with a diamond coating.

The " Côtes de Genève rayonnantes" finish of the bridges is emphasised by the skeletonised oscillating weight, stamped at the centre with the double interlinked "L".

The gold dial with a hand-crafted guilloché, carries an individual number applied consecutively on each piece. The hour and minutes are clearly and precisely displayed separately (regulator) with the seconds (fixed to the tourbillon carriage) indicated on a 30-second sector.

The design of the OSMIOR case is inspired by the most beautiful L.Leroy pocket watches with advanced complications. Its soft, fluid shape sculpted in pink-tinted gold or in fully polished white gold highlights the exceptional delicacy of the timepiece and its elegant proportions.
Watchmaker to the Naval Ministry since 1835, L.Leroy equipped the most prestigious civil and military fleets in Europe until the end of the 1980s. The company is therefore perfectly qualified to offer a line of contemporary products destined to perpetuate this tradition of excellence in chronometry. By definition, a marine chronometer must offer a highly legible display of information and guarantee perfect stability of precision timekeeping, even in adverse conditions that may persist for long periods.

Precise indication of the hour, minute and second, maintained since a reference point of departure, is absolutely critical because it alone enables experienced navigators (who also use celestial observations) to determine the vessel’s longitudinal position very accurately. In short, reliability and the clarity of displayed information are the essential characteristics of an on-board chronometer (real “life insurance” for sailors) considering that a difference of one second in the time can alter the calculated position by almost 500 metres.
The MARINE line

The MARINE model with large seconds and power reserve indication – Automatic Calibre L.511

The calibre L.511 developed and produced by our Manufacture in the Vallée de Joux is an example of our timekeeping expertise. Its exceptional finishing highlights the regulator (balance with 4 gold regulating screws) and the energy transmission (a revolutionary “StruTech” -blanked, anchor escapement in silicium with a diamond coating), fixed and protected by two endpieces in “poli-noir” steel. Its grained-champlévé finish is firmly contemporary, discreetly echoing the design of the famous movements for marine chronometers produced by L.Leroy throughout the 20th century. It is also highlighted by the guilloche of the central oscillating weight in gold.

As for the case, its robust, imposing style evokes the design of the on-board “a cardan” chronometers. A special system of fixing the bezel avoids the need for screws on the back. Offering greater possibilities for decoration or personalisation while still ensuring water-resistance to 100 m.

Available in pink-tinted or white gold, marine cases are fitted with scratch-resistant sapphire crystals, making the dial highly legible and revealing all the beauty of the movement through the back of the watch.

Each chronometer is individually numbered in a consecutive series that includes all the marine watches the company has produced in its long, extraordinary history. Certified by the prestigious Besançon Observatory, it is stamped with the “Viper’s head” and is delivered to its owner accompanied by its official control certificate.

The chronometer information, Indicated by fine, mild-steel hands, is clearly displayed in the refined design of the traditional dial, enhanced by a hand-crafted guilloche applique.
The new L.Leroy collections

The themes chosen by L.Leroy to develop its range as part of the relaunch of the brand are all inspired by the great periods in the company’s history.

Fine watchmaking with “grande complications”, marine chronometry, sports and scientific chronometry, as well as unique pieces and specialities created to order are some of the areas in which the legitimacy of its rich historical heritage is undeniable. With its slogan “L.Leroy, haute horlogerie française de précision depuis 1785”, the collection is based on two product lines, developed in different design directions but closely linked by their neoclassical “DNA” and their consummate quality.

With the OSMIOR line concentrating on the world of classic complications and the MARINE line focusing on sports navigation, L.Leroy offers a choice of carefully selected models that perfectly illustrate the excellence of its manufacturing craftsmanship.

Exploded view of the double-spring tourbillon carriage
Escapement in silicon coated with diamond.
61 parts with a total weight of 0.8 grams.
Calibre L.512
Concept, research and development

L.Leroy designers, engineers and watchmakers are driven by the same passion and the same commitment: to create exceptional mechanical timepieces that are certified chronometers with rigorously tested reliability.

Their objective is to offer collections that bring together all the avant-garde, sometimes futuristic, watchmaking technologies while drawing on the expertise accumulated by the company over more than two centuries.

The processes of creation, final design and development (including prototypes) are mostly carried out within the company. This gives it great flexibility in adapting to the specific demands of its clients.

Sales and distribution

The L.Leroy brand is present in all leading boutiques and points of sale at the heart of every major city in the world. They have been selected according to precise criteria to ensure they offer a service that matches the expectations of their distinguished clientele of connoisseurs.

L.Leroy considers its sales partners as indispensible links between the brand and the owner, providing an essential added-value in the presentation of its collections.

Their experience and expertise, and the quality of their service provide the last, vital link in the long chain that stretches from the company’s workshops to the final client.

Quality principles

The uncompromising quality that is immediately obvious in L.Leroy products results, above all, from the superb know-how of its staff and the careful choice of excellent partners.

From the design stage to the final assembly of the components, the most rigorous quality control principles are applied, guaranteeing fine workmanship and long-lasting excellence. In addition to the traditional guarantees given to watchmaking products, L.Leroy offers a repair warranty that covers all its models indefinitely.
Thanks to

Patek Philippe Museum, Geneva, Switzerland
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