



MEN'S FOLIO

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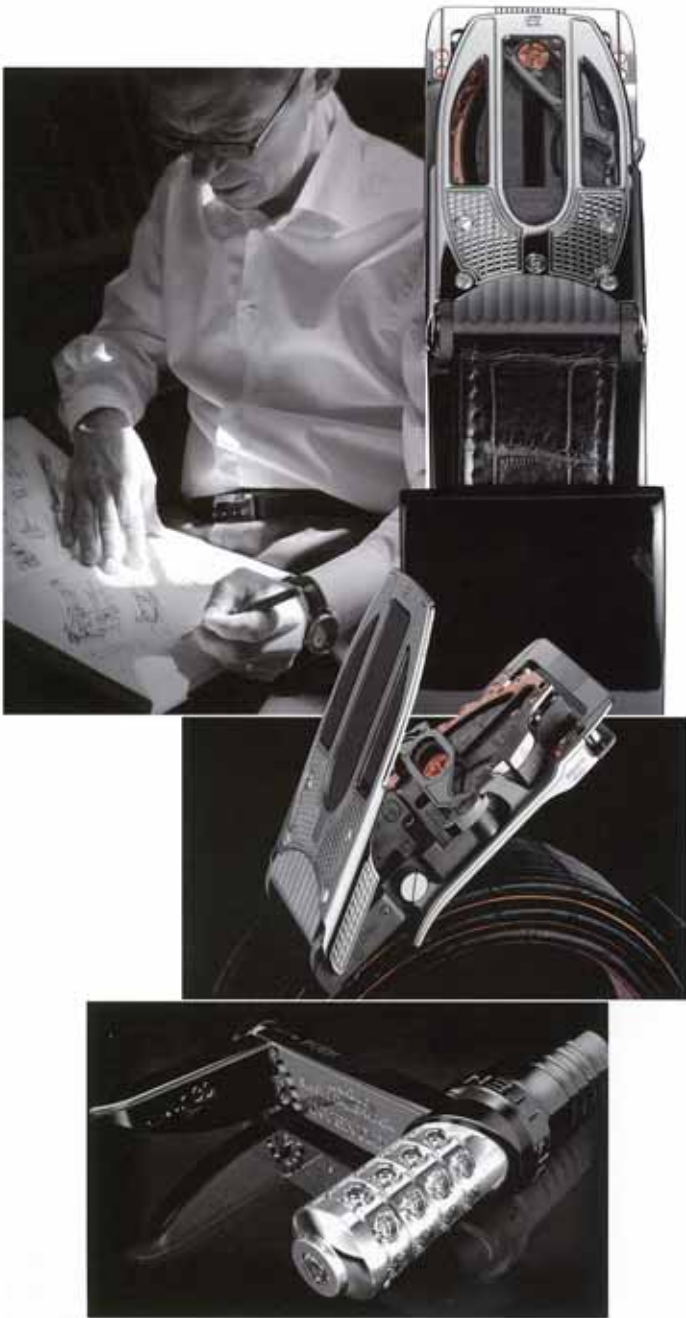
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THE MECHANIC

Roland Iten, the man behind luxury mechanical accessories, describes his pioneering work in belt buckles, cardcases and cufflinks. By Aravin Kumar



You may think that a belt is merely a leather or canvas strap fastened around your waist to prevent your pants from falling to your embarrassment. But once you've laid your hands on Roland Iten's creations, you would decide otherwise. Blending precision, functionality and comfort, Iten's belts utilise the capabilities of the Swiss watch-making industry to forge an entire genre dubbed 'mechanical luxury'.

Men's Folio: Could you tell us about your background and formative years?

Roland Iten: I come from a family of engineers, but I'm not an engineer myself. When I was growing up, I woke up every morning for breakfast to a product design meeting with my father. It certainly influenced me to be where I am today.

You have worked as an apprentice with German artist and communication designer Michael Schirner. How did that experience shape your design sensibility?

On the first day I met Michael Schirner at his studio, he was asleep, which was funny. Working under him had a huge impact on me. It has shaped my views regarding my approach to design, and he remains my mentor today.

Why do you think the mechanical performance of your belts is so attractive to men?

A man who wears a solid gold horological machine on his wrist is not wearing it because it tells time. He wears it because he likes to celebrate the core values of tradition, unique craft and timeless beauty. These are the same core values built into the belt buckles that I create, and they are appreciated by the same discerning client.

Your accessories are similar to watches. They have mechanical movements and they are created with similar materials. Is watch-making a possibility?

I know all the watch-makers as friends. However, if I were to create a watch, I'll be competing with so many others. With mechanical luxury, I'm alone at the top and I'm comfortable with that.

It takes on average 18 months to design and produce a Roland Iten Mechanical Luxury product. Take me through the process of creating a mechanical accessory, from sketch to product.

Artisans hand finish each piece, combining precious metals with inlays such as mother-of-pearl, exotic hardwoods and pave diamonds. Contrasting it to a regular belt, it is like comparing the handle of a taxi with the handle of a Bugatti. Each product has to go through an arduous design, prototype, mechanical testing and production process. Time and patience are required to ensure the distinct high standards of craftsmanship. There are no off-the-shelf pieces and parts – everything is designed and made to order.

What has been the personal highlight of your career thus far?

Spotting my creations on the street gives me a form of contentment. If you do spot someone wearing one of my belts, I'm certain he will be someone interesting. I create belts not for a man with a huge bank account, but for the man who owns the bank.

You have previously collaborated with Bugatti. Will we be seeing more collaboration in the future?

The Bugatti collaboration came about when I sold my belts to an Italian couple, who owned a Bugatti. It felt natural because I feel we are both on the same level because of our similar principles in design. I believe it might happen again in the future if it's the right fit. **MF**