



*Best of*  
**BVLGARI**

*As Bulgari celebrates 40 years of watchmaking, AIR talks to design director Fabrizio Buonamassa Stigliani about the brand's classic models and exciting new arrivals*

*Words: Lara Brunt*

Compared to its 131-year history of making modern, elegant and colourful high jewellery worn by legendary beauties such as Elizabeth Taylor and Sophia Loren, Bulgari's four decades as a watchmaker may seem inconsequential. Yet, any comparisons made simply on numbers fail to acknowledge what the Italian brand has achieved in watchmaking in such a relatively short period of time.

2014 was a case in point. "Last year, we had an amazing year," agrees Fabrizio Buonamassa Stigliani, senior director of Bulgari's Watches Design Centre. "We broke the rules with the Octo Finissimo Tourbillon and we gained the [Jewellery Watch] prize at the Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève with the Diva."

While the 18-carat white gold Diva timepiece, set with baguette-cut and brilliant-cut diamonds and

The concept watch features a 41mm steel case, with the case middle in magnesium and PEEK polymer, and a ceramic bezel engraved with the double Bulgari logo, along with a mechanical self-winding movement that operates at 4Hz and has a 42-hour power reserve. It represents another big step for the Italian marque, says the designer.

"It's an intelligent watch – it's not a smart watch – that is 100 per cent Swiss-made and 100 per cent mechanical," he explains. "The idea was to put a chip inside a timeless product – because a luxury watch has to be timeless – that can manage your private information with your mobile. So your mobile becomes old in six months or a year, but your watch is timeless."

Bulgari's approach to trends and technology reflects that of its very first timepiece, the Bulgari Roma, launched in 1975 when quartz technology had turned

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emeralds, wins in the style stakes, the Octo Finissimo Tourbillon (left) lays claims to the title of the world's thinnest tourbillon movement. Made up of 249 parts, the Octo Finissimo calibre operates at 3 Hz, has a power reserve of about 55 hours, and comes in at over a millimetre thinner than Arnold & Son's UTTE (1.95mm vs 2.97mm).

The movement is a testament to Bulgari's reputation as not only a design-led manufacture, but a technical one too. "We have amazing skills," says Buonamassa Stigliani. "You have to spend four or five years first to design this kind of movement and you have only one way to produce it. Each element inside the movement has to be more or less perfect because you don't have enough space to make mistakes. So this is a great step for the brand because it's so difficult to imagine this kind of movement and only three or four brands in the watchmaking industry are able to do this."

At Baselworld this year, Bulgari unveiled the Diagono Magnesium concept watch (right), a self-winding mechanical watch incorporating a cryptographic chip and invisible antenna which, using NFC (Near Field Communication) technology, enables the watch to transmit a digital certificate to the Bulgari Vault app on the user's smartphone. The brand has partnered with Swiss digital security firm Wisekey to ensure that only the owner of the watch has access to the confidential content on their "wrist-vault".





traditional watchmaking on its head. “The trend for digital watches was so strong and Bulgari made its own interpretation with a solid gold case and limited to only 100 pieces. Today, the smart watch [trend] is so strong and Bulgari makes its own interpretation with an absolutely mechanical piece so only the technology in your mobile becomes old,” he says.

To mark the 40th anniversary of the iconic model, the brand is presenting a series of new models: the commemorative edition Roma Finissimo, Roma Tourbillon Finissimo, Bulgari Bulgari Solotempo and Roma Tubogas. “Bulgari has to be contemporary and avant-garde, so it’s not copy and paste from the archives – it’s new interpretations with new proportions,” says Buonamassa Stigliani. “The first Bulgari Roma was a 35mm [case] so I cannot use exactly the same details and proportions because today a 35mm doesn’t make sense for a man and we have the Finissimo movement that needs a 41mm case.”

The 44-year-old from Naples joined the company in 2001 after three years at Fiat’s Style Centre in Turin designing cars, and has been in his current role since

2007. Designing cars and watches is not so dissimilar, he says. “In my opinion, a designer has to be able to design cars, planes, trains, watches. When you are an automotive designer you have to know the technology and the language behind this product. It’s exactly the same thing when you talk about watches. If you know these secrets, you are able to design all elements that you have around you – furniture, watches, cars, anything,” he says.

While Buonamassa Stigliani is not involved in technical development, his role is to ensure Bulgari timepieces strike the perfect balance of Italian style and Swiss know-how. This prompted him in 2011 to move the Bulgari design team from Rome to Neuchâtel in Switzerland, home of the brand’s in-house watchmaking

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production. “When you see the Octo Finissimo or the Carillon Tourbillon – very iconic pieces – you cannot manage all this complexity from Rome,” he says.

Staying true to Bulgari’s heritage as a jeweller is also vital. “My ambition is to innovate with 100 per cent respect to our roots and our DNA,” he says. “And I think we have done a good job with [2014’s sundial-inspired] Lucea, because this was exactly the aim: to make a mainstream watch with the iconic signature of the brand. And when you see Lucea with its proportion and

the bracelet and the crown, it’s absolutely clear that we are talking about Bulgari.”

And while the inspiration for Bulgari timepieces undoubtedly comes from Rome, Buonamassa Stigliani must also imagine new products and predict trends – no mean feat for any designer. “Bulgari has an amazing heritage and archive – you have to find the right science and imagine how this will evolve in the future for the next Bulgari products,” he says. With Buonamassa Stigliani at the helm, the future looks bright for Bulgari.