

The 2017 Gaïa Awards: Richard Mille, Jean-Marc Wiederrecht, And Laurence Marti Honored

by Elizabeth Doerr

In 1993, the [Musée International d'Horlogerie in La Chaux-de-Fonds \(MIH\)](#) created the Prix Gaïa to honor the memory of one of the earliest patrons of the museum, Maurice Ditisheim.

In sharp contrast to the Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève, which can be seen more as the Academy Awards or Oscars, the Gaïa has often been called the Nobel Prize of the watch industry.

Craftsmanship, creation: Jean-Marc Wiederrecht

The jury of the 2017 Prix Gaïa awarded [Agenhor](#) founder Jean-Marc Wiederrecht “for his creative contribution to horological complications, marrying function with beauty in his work for many brands.”



Jean-Marc Wiederrecht (left) with Singer Reimagined founders Rob Dickinson and Marco Borraccino

My own take on Wiederrecht's attitude toward the mechanical watch is that it is rather poetic. One of the true mechanical artists of the luxury watch industry, Wiederrecht seems to me to be chiefly occupied with the purest values of this art form. And those are rare attributes – and even rarer when you stop to consider that he has been able to build a thriving business on such values.

Wiederrecht finished his watchmaker education at Geneva's school of watchmaking in 1972, beginning his career at the height of the quartz crisis. Perhaps this is why he has adapted such a modest outlook on life, growing up with an industry that had to re-learn the values and luxury of the mechanical watch. He first worked for Châtelain, then set up his own business in 1978.



Jean-Marc Wiederrecht (left) with his wife Catherine and son Nicolas; Agenhor is a family business

Wiederrecht and his wife Catherine founded Agenhor SA in 1996. Their business is a custom one, boasting an impressive catalogue of some of the world's most complicated timepieces – watches that he and his team developed for his clients, including perpetual calendars, jump hours, retrograde functions, and spatial mastery.

Wiederrecht patented his perpetual calendar retrograde complication in 1988, which he developed with Roger Dubuis. Simplicity is key for Wiederrecht, and he relies on his instincts, not a paper trail or virtual realities to create timepieces for his many clients. "One of the problems [of our industry] is that you can make what you want with the computer; virtual watches have exploded," Wiederrecht once explained his philosophy to me. "When I make something, it is very simple. If it is too complicated, you can forget it because it won't work."

Now 67 years old, Wiederrecht has laid the future of Agenhor primarily in the hands of his two sons, Laurent and Nicolas, as he and Catherine have decided to at least partially retire and enjoy the beauty of the wider world, something that has always drawn the philosophically inclined Wiederrecht.



Some of the key watches Wiederrecht and his team at Agenhor have created include Harry Winston's bi-retrograde perpetual calendar, MB&F Horological Machine No. 2, the Arnold & Son True North, Harry Winston Opus 9 (see [The Harry Winston Opus Series: A Complete Overview From Opus 1 Through Opus 13](#)), Van Cleef & Arpels's Poetic Complications, the Hermès Arceau Temps Suspendu and Slim d'Hermès perpetual calendar and L'Heure Impatiente, the Fabergé Visionnaire DTZ, and the AgenGraphe, which now powers the Fabergé Visionnaire Chronograph and the Singer Reimagined Track 1.



In 2007, the unassuming watchmaker won one of the industry's highest honors: Best Watchmaker at the Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève. Wiederrecht received his award to thunderous applause from the audience, which comprised key figures of the watch industry. "It was completely crazy," the modest Wiederrecht once remembered with a smile when I asked him about it. "One thing I remember very strongly when my name was called was that a lot of people applauded a lot. And that was a very big surprise: I didn't know I was so well known at the time."

In winning the 2017 Prix Gaïa for Artisanal Creation, Wiederrecht joins technical and artistic virtuosos that include the likes of François-Paul Journe, Michel Parmigiani, Derek Pratt (who co-created many Urban Jürgensen recent-history works), George Daniels, Beat Haldimann, Swatch's Jacques Müller and Elmar Mock, Corum's René Bannwart, automaton maker François Junod, Eric Coudray of Cabestan and Jaeger-LeCoultre, and A.H.C.I. members Vincent Calabrese, Philippe Dufour, Paul Gerber, Andreas Strehler, Vianney Halter (last year's winner), and Kari Voutilainen in this category. Anita Porchet has been the only female recipient thus far (see [The 2015 Gaïa Awards: Giulio Papi, Anita Porchet, And Jonathan Betts Honored](#)).