



VINCENT CALABRESE

REBEL OF INDEPENDENT WATCHMAKING

He had no formal education, yet he became an icon of independent watchmaking. Vincent Calabrese is not only a co-founder of the AHCI, but also a watchmaker who has always placed emphasis on freedom, innovation, and philosophy.

He was born in January 1944 in the heart of Naples, a vibrant city where the roar of scooters, street songs, and the unwritten laws of the neighborhood collide. In an environment where only the most determined survive, one must fight to earn their place. And it is precisely here that the story of a future legend of independent watchmaking begins.

A HARSH CHILDHOOD

From an early age, Vincent showed a strong sense of social justice and an unwillingness to submit to authority. "At thirteen, I was expelled from school. I stood up for a classmate who was being bullied by the headmaster's son. Everyone knew I was right, but power lay elsewhere," he recalls today without bitterness. That incident set off a chain of events that would fundamentally shape his life. His mother, a practical and decisive woman, chose to act. "She replied to an advertisement from a watchmaker looking for a new apprentice. Still, nothing at that point suggested that I would become a watchmaker," Calabrese adds.

A TEENAGE WATCHMAKER

Acceptance came with a condition: the purchase of basic tools—something the family, living in difficult circumstances, could barely afford. "I was given a box of old watches, half-working and broken. That was my first real school. I took them



**I WAS A REBEL, AND I
STILL AM**

Nothing suggested
that Vincent would
become a watchmaker.
The rest, as they say, is
history.

apart, studied them, put them back together, and then dismantled them again. It was pure alchemy—every component had its purpose, yet there was always room for improvisation." The watchmaker he apprenticed with was more a quiet observer than a teacher. Calabrese was driven by curiosity and a restless mind. After three months, however, the original apprentice unexpectedly returned, and young Vincent had to leave. "That's when I realized I could rely on no one. I opened my own workshop. I was fourteen," he says.

WATCHES AS A MEANS TO AN END

He did not choose watchmaking out of love. It was a way to survive and to be independent. "I wanted to stand on my own. I didn't want to burden my mother. In Naples, you learn to be strong—or you disappear." That restlessness stayed with him. With every repair he learned more, yet at the same time he felt that this was only a transitional phase.

AN ITALIAN IN SWITZERLAND

When he was eighteen, he was due to begin his compulsory military service in the navy. But that was not for him. "I could never say 'yes, sir' to someone I didn't respect. The idea of saluting someone simply because they held a higher rank terrified me. I didn't want to submit. I felt that my life was meant to go in »»

a different direction. "And so he left for Switzerland—the land of precision, neutrality, and, of course, watches. He arrived in Le Locle, a town with a long watchmaking tradition. But his reception was far from warm. "When I said I was a watchmaker, they replied, 'That's not possible, you're Italian.' It wasn't a lack of trust in my skills, but pure prejudice. That pushed me forward. I told myself: I'll prove to them that an Italian can be better than any of them." That moment became a turning point. Calabrese vowed to succeed regardless of his origin, education, or status. He wanted to become a watchmaker of a new generation—not bound by tradition, but guided by the heart.

SPATIALE AND THE GOLDEN BRIDGE

In Switzerland, his relentless journey truly began. With no formal education—only intuition, determination, and an innate feel for mechanics. In 1975, he began designing his first own watch, Spatile. He completed it two years later. In 1977, he presented the model at the International Watch Salon in Geneva, where it won a gold medal. "It was a turning point. My style was born—space, airiness, the beauty of the mechanism, and also an idea that the Corum brand would later transform into the Golden Bridge. I was shocked that people bought watches for fashion, for the brand, for the color of the dial, while the movement was hidden inside the case like in a coffin. The movement is the heart of a watch and deserves space. That, in turn, makes it possible to give a watch the shape the customer desires and to create a bond between their wish

Q&A WITH JURA

„Vincent, what do you like to do when you're not working?"
I never work. I live my life—my joys and my victories

„What brings you the greatest joy outside of watchmaking?"
Seeing that my creations bring people joy and that they are loved.

„What is your favorite film?"
The one that ends with the villain's death.

"Your favorite book?"
The one that achieved success in my life.

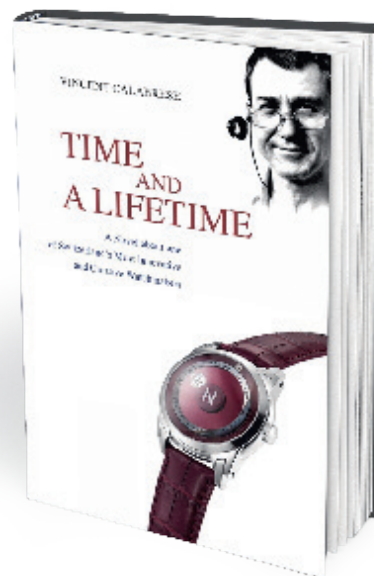
"What message would you like to pass on to our readers?"
Let them look at my life story and choose their own path—the path of their own life.

Success also lies in being able to share your enthusiasm with others.

and my joy of creation. I never set boundaries for myself, and I even questioned the sacred icons of watchmaking," Vincent tells me.

THE QUARTZ CRISIS

The 1970s wiped out hundreds of traditional manufacturers. Calabrese chose to resist. "Mechanical watches are not just about accuracy. They are poetry in motion, sculptural craftsmanship. They are a way of sharing an idea." Through watches, he began to express his philosophy: beauty in simplicity, courage in unconventionality, and



VINCENT CALABRESE

In 2017, he also wrote the book *Time and a Lifetime*. In the form of a novel, it retraces the key milestones of his life—from childhood in a poor Neapolitan neighborhood, through a harsh start in Switzerland, to the creation of iconic watches such as the Golden Bridge and flying tourbillon.

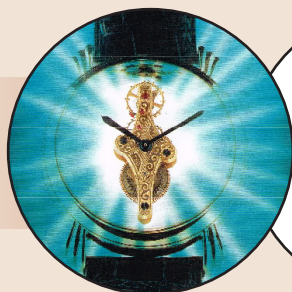
SPATIAL COLLECTION

The Spatial collection is built on a revolutionary idea: the movement mechanism is brought to the forefront as the "heart" of the watch.

GRIFFE COLLECTION

"Griffe" — French for "claw." The collection illustrates the act of grasping time while it simultaneously flows away. Thematically, it is based on the same principle of wandering hours. A tonneau-shaped case and an automatic ETA calibre create a harmony of technology and symbolism.

— 1986 — 1996 — 2004 — 2005 — 2016 — 2018 —



ESPRIT



EQUUS



OPTICA



FLY'ORA WHITEA



KRONOS



GRIFFE

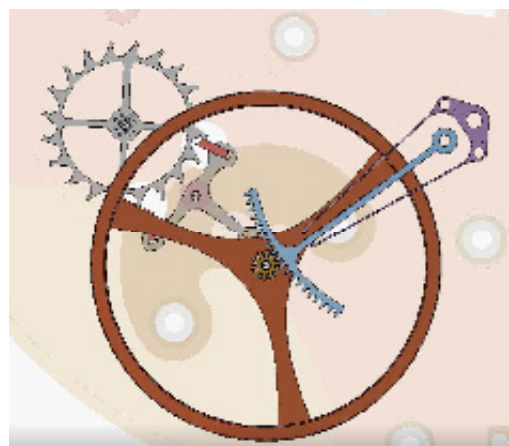
CLASSIC COLLECTION

This collection offers the most refined complications for both the eye and the mind, the result of more than thirty worldwide patents. It places emphasis on the technical and aesthetic maturity of its complications. Calabrese says these are the most beautiful technical innovations.



THE PRINCIPLE OF THE CALASYS SYSTEM

Instead of a traditional balance spring, there is a pinion mounted on the balance staff, connected via a gear train to a rack that oscillates back and forth.



respect for the invisible craft. His models Baladin, the Ludiques collection, and others are not merely complications—they are statements. The Baladin, for example, which he created in five days and whose patent he sold at the Vicenza fair within fifteen days, was proof of both his inventiveness and his business instinct.

CO-FOUNDER OF THE AHCI

When he sold the patent for the Golden Bridge to Corum, the contract stipulated that his name would be forever associated with the complication. But two years later, the brand approached him with a request: could his name be removed? "They said it sounded too Italian and damaged the image. They offered me higher royalties, but without my name." He took the blow—but he did not forget it. "I realized I wasn't the first this had happened to. And certainly not the last."



VINCENT CALABRESE

He is a co-founder of the Académie Horlogère des Créateurs Indépendants and the author of forty patents.

He decided to act. Together with Svend Andersen, he founded the AHCI—the Académie Horlogère des Créateurs Indépendants—in 1985. The first exhibition took place at the Musée d'Horlogerie du Locle. "We wanted to be visible. We wanted craftsmen and self-taught makers to be given the space they had long been denied."

PHILOSOPHER AND VISIONARY

Calabrese began to perceive watches as a philosophical tool. "I'm not a watch fanatic. But through watches, I can tell stories. Express attitudes." His models contain hidden poetic and philosophical layers. He believes a mechanism must communicate with the person who wears it. "Every owner should understand what I wanted to tell them." His creative process is explosive. "Ideas come like lightning. Sometimes I have to put them aside. I let them mature, and then, when the time comes, I realize them >>>

HISTORICAL COLLECTION

A retrospective of Calabrese's lifetime body of work, including pivotal models such as the Golden Bridge—a symbol that changed the rules of watch design—as well as the Baladin.

EROTIC COLLECTION

The "Mona Lisa" model represents a fusion of innovation with a tastefully depicted erotic undertone on the dial.

At the six o'clock position, it features the Mona Lisa, who gradually undresses.

1980

1999

1995

2001

2004

1985



GOLDEN BRIDGE



BALADIN



NIGHT & DAY



SUNTRAL G



ANALOGICA



MONA LISA RED

LUDIQUES COLLECTION

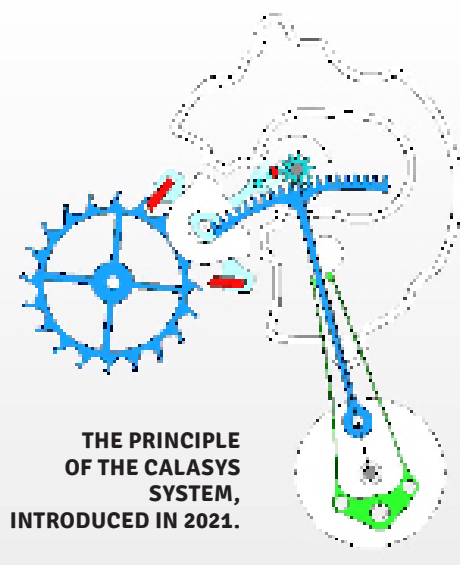
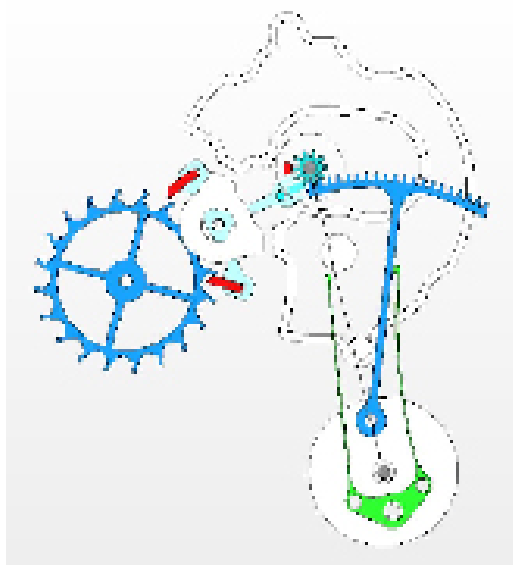
Ludiques (z francouzského ludique, tedy „hravý“) představuje jednu z nejodvážnějších a nejzábavnějších kapitol v tvorbě Vincenta Calabrese. Jde o sérii hodinek, které si pohrávají s tradičními principy zobrazení času a přetvářejí je do vizuálně nečekaných a mechanicky fascinujících řešení.

WHAT YOU MAY NOT KNOW

Hora-Nova (HN—the logo that appears on the watches) is the name of the watchmaking company that Vincent Calabrese co-founded in 2001 together with fellow independent watchmaker Jean Kazès. The name “Hora-Nova” comes from Latin and means “new hour” or “new time.” It is both a philosophical and a technical concept—a reference to a new approach to measuring and perceiving time.



VINCENT is a remarkable 82 years old, and he created his first watch 49 years ago.

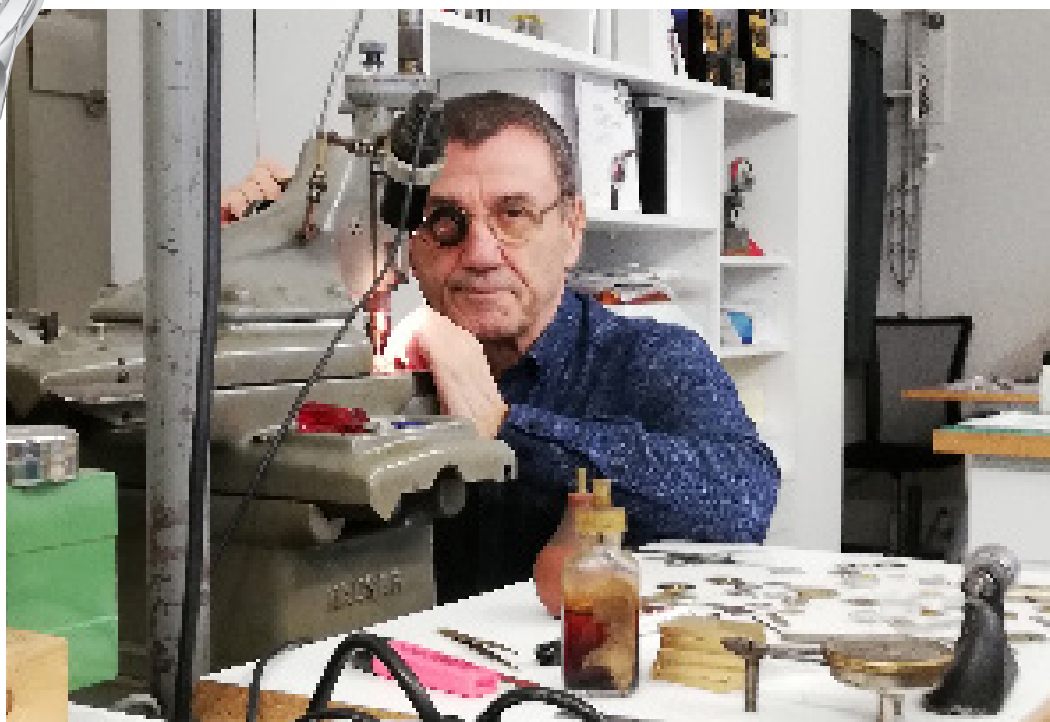


in their purest form.” This is the case with his latest innovation—Calasys, a hairspring-free oscillator. “I had that idea back in 1978, but I only realized it during COVID in 2021. After four centuries, I freed the mechanism from the balance spring.” His workshop in Lausanne remains open. He does not close himself off to the young. “I don’t tell them: be like me. I say: find your own path. Don’t create by imitation—create from the soul.” Today, Vincent Calabrese belongs among the legends. He received the prestigious Prix Gaïa for craftsmanship innovation. He has created dozens of complications and

designs. He has collaborated with Blancpain, Corum, and many others—yet never denied his independence. “As a self-taught watchmaker, I presented Blancpain with the finest tourbillons and carousels. Those are my two beloved children..”

OTTICA – A MERE ILLUSION?

On the Ottica dial, it appears that the watch offers both analog and digital displays—but is that really the case? Or are we dealing with an illusion, much like time itself? Behind this illusion lies a complex movement that transforms a watchmaking complication into a true work of art. “The watch was created in 2000, but its





OTTICA Miroir Blue face

- ◆ **Strojek:** mechanický s automatickým nátahem (ETA 2892A2)
- ◆ **Frekvence:** 28 800 polokmitů/h
- ◆ **Rezerva chodu:** 42 hodin
- ◆ **Pouzdro:** Ø 40 mm
- ◆ **Funkce:** komplikace Putující hodiny s optickým efektem
- ◆ **Číselník:** modrý
- ◆ **Sklíčko:** safírové sklo
- ◆ **Dýnko:** průhledné kryté safírovým sklem
- ◆ **Voděodolnost:** 30 m
- ◆ **Řemínek:** kožený, modrý
- ◆ **Cena:** 7 600 CHF

He concludes our conversation with the words:

"Everyone must find their own path to happiness and to a life in harmony with their values."

origin goes back to an older idea of mine from 1989, when I developed the so-called Heure Vagabonde (Wandering Hours) display. At the time, I told myself that if I didn't have hands in the center—because I only had a rotating aperture—I could use the central hands in a different way. But I didn't want to do it immediately. From 1989, I waited until 2000 to create this watch. Why? Because when I was a child, in the 1950s, people used to say that in the year 2000 Martians would arrive in flying saucers, travel through space, and fall into black holes," Vincent says. The Wandering Hours complication, patented by Vincent Calabrese, is used to display the minutes on the dial, ensuring perfect legibility. The ingenious mechanism gives the impression of a combination of analog and digital display, but in reality, it is an illusion.

IT WORKS EVEN WITHOUT A BALANCE SPRING

Removing the traditional balance spring may sound complex, yet the principle of the Calasys system is simple. Instead of a conventional hairspring, a pinion is mounted on the balance staff and connected via a gear train to a rack that oscillates back and forth, while two spring arms alternately apply force opposing the rotation. The gearing is designed so that the balance achieves the greatest possible amplitude, while the rack operates with the smallest possible angle of motion. This patented oscillator concept could be applied to virtually any type of escapement. The first obvious objection concerns friction between the rack and the pinion (earlier rack-and-lever escapements were replaced by separate escapement mechanisms), as well as friction in other parts of the new system. Calabrese responds: "Friction is continuous, and therefore controllable. You simply need to calculate it properly and apply the right solutions."

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Vincent is a remarkable 82 years old, and he created his first watch 49 years ago. According to Mr. Calabrese, if future generations come to love watchmaking—not merely as a luxury investment—they will certainly stand on his side: on the side of innovation, not necessarily tradition. This is despite the fact that he does not consider mechanics to be the most suitable tool for measuring time in sports or racing. Electronic timing will always be more accurate and free of human intervention. For aspiring watchmakers, he has one piece of advice: "Stick to my philosophy—not my watches!" (laughs) ■