



## IN FOCUS

COSANOVA DESIGN | TALKING WATCH DESIGN WITH CLAUDIO D'AMORE  
TEXT BY: KEITH W. STRANDBERG



◀ Eterna Contessa collection

▲ Eberhard 120ème anniversaire collection

**Watch design** can be a baffling subject to be sure. I'm speaking here of the visible, external product design, the style, the dimensions, the proportions, all the elements that come together to form an aesthetic and attract our attention to a timepiece. And while it doesn't require the same sort of mechanical engineering that the inside of a modern watch does, watch design entails its own kind of technical prowess; it involves combining myriad details into a statement-making unified whole within the limits of a very small space.

No one knows this better than Claudio D'Amore, the founder of Cosanova Product Design, a Swiss design firm specializing in watches. D'Amore established Cosanova (a name signifying a "new thing") in 2004 after working for a time with well-known London-based industrial designer Ross Lovegrove, one of whose clients was TAG Heuer.

As a product design firm, Cosanova undertakes projects in categories ranging from electronics to jewelry, but it has developed something of a specialty by serving clients in the watch industry. And located in Lausanne, Switzerland, not far from Geneva, it is well situated to do so. "Eighty percent

of what Cosanova does is watches," D'Amore explains.

D'Amore studied at the University of Art and Design in Lausanne, and was initially most interested in furniture design. But over time, he turned his attention to the small everyday objects that enhance the quality of life for people and make them smile. He says, "I like products people touch (watches, jewelry, handbags, mobile phones, electronics and so on). I love watches; they are jewels for men. I loved them from the day I started working on them and realized the extreme detail involved."

Some of Cosanova's clients in the watch

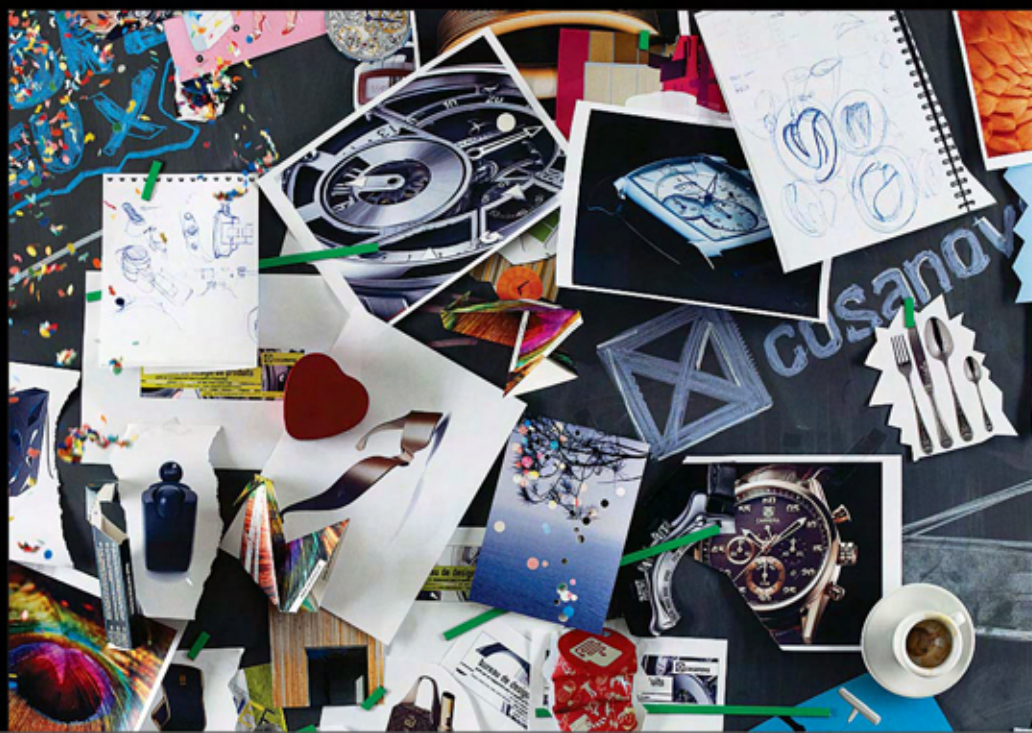
industry have included **Hautlence, TAG Heuer, Montblanc, Parmigiani Fleurier, Concord and Van Cleef & Arpels**. In total, the firm counts 15 watch brands among its clients. "The biggest challenge for us is that there are so many watches and every client wants something new," D'Amore continues. "We work hard to find innovation in watches, to find the proper character, the balance between all the little elements. It is detail that makes the difference."

"We work on entire watches as well as parts of watches (dials, hands, etc.)," he details. "We often work on a bestseller that needs only small changes. In such cases, there should be only enough change to make a difference. This is a huge challenge, to create evolutionary designs that build on the core of a brand."

Today, some companies employ in-house designers, while others do not. However, even those manufacturers that do have designers on staff often go outside the company in a



Claudio D'Amore



▲ **Hautlence** The design of this watch finds its inspiration in the aesthetics of machined engine parts.

◀ **Moodboard** In the studio you'll find a big board on which anyone can pin pictures or items. This patchwork evolves over time and is a constant inspiration for the team.



## DESIGN CONFIDENTIAL

Asked whether working with a number of brands raises issues of confidentiality, Claudio D'Amore of Cosanova Product Design answers that protecting the intellectual property of clients is a top priority. And clients who wish to remain anonymous can fully expect to have those wishes honored. "It's difficult for a watch brand to trust a new designer, so we make it easy for a client to say no and walk away," D'Amore admits. "So far, no client has done that, but it's important that they know they can. One of our strengths is that we work hard to know the client. A client has to be able to trust us, and we take every precaution to provide clients with confidentiality."

▼ Parmigiani  
Kalpagraph



◀ Eterna Kontiki: design of chrono and three-hand dials based on historical model.

◀ Eterna Contessa: a feminine and elegant Art Deco-inspired design respectful of the maker's history.

quest for fresh ideas. D'Amore describes the process: "Following a briefing from the client, we begin work to meet their specific needs. **Brand to brand, everything is different. Each brand has its particular DNA.** TAG Heuer, for example, is very male and very sporty. It has a recognizable aesthetic. It's always a challenge to keep new products in the design family. We look for details that make the aesthetic link. We work extremely hard to find things that fit with the brand."

It's important to D'Amore that he and his colleagues at Cosanova understand the watch production process, so that they can understand what is possible in terms of design and what is practical in terms of cost. They also need to know what won't work. And that necessarily involves another universe of details. "We need to know how molds are made, how cases are finished and so on," he says.

**What inspires D'Amore?** "I am inspired

by volume and by natural shapes, and I like the world of nanotechnology," he explains. "I also find inspiration in the detail of nature—insect wings with very beautiful shapes as well as textures that I would like to apply to watches. Nature is the king of design. I do a lot of hiking and walking. It's important to be out of the office from time to time to be alone and to think and create. **It takes a long time for some ideas to come forward. Sometimes they need to turn in the brain for some time, even for years.** There are some personal projects I have been working on for more than three years."

When he is in the office, D'Amore loves the unending variety of his daily work, and he believes that with each passing day, he becomes a better designer. "Every day, I am a bit more 'right' about the product," he says. "If a product is to sell, I want to make sure it sells. Some companies want a talking piece; others want a watch that will sell well. Our job is to give each client what it wants."

## THE PROCESS

The design process is the constant in D'Amore's work. He applies the same basic process to each new project, regardless of the particular product or sector involved. In broad terms, here's what's involved.

**Step 1:** Research of images of reference - Inspired by photos and objects, the designers begin by sketching numerous ideas.

**Step 2:** Design research - Based on their sketches, the designers create 2-D computer drawings of about 20 options.

**Step 3:** Research of materials, textures and finishing from the firm's materials bank takes place.

**Step 4:** 3-D development - Once a direction has been selected from the 2-D computer drawings, a 3-D computer model is created, and the design is evaluated from every angle.

**Step 5:** Rapid prototyping - From the 3-D files, a plastic model is created in order to validate the proportions of the object.

**Step 6:** Final prototyping - Once the product design is finalized, a metal prototype is made for a last round of fine-tuning before entering production.