

The background is a vibrant, stylized illustration of a jungle. A large, textured tree trunk with brown and green foliage dominates the upper half. In the foreground, a green champagne bottle with a white label and a foil-wrapped cork stands on a yellowish ground. To the right of the bottle is a large, purple and yellow rock. The overall style is bold and graphic, with a rich color palette of greens, yellows, purples, and browns.

# INDEPENDENT LUXURY

THE FOUR INNOVATION STRATEGIES TO  
ENDURE IN THE CONSOLIDATION JUNGLE

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an adequate return on their investment, but they also have a long-term view on the development of the restaurant. In addition, it is important to have the right staff to manage the restaurant. Although I am no longer in the kitchen full-time, I try to be there as much as I can. It is where I find my greatest satisfaction, a unique feeling when I make a discovery, or I taste an exceptional ingredient. It is not in the numbers, even though they are important, but to support the vision.”

Mirazur has 30 employees today and uses social media extensively, Mauro being particularly active on Twitter. He also acts as a consultant for, among others, the Alvear Palace Hotel in Buenos Aires, Argentina, which is a member of the Leading Hotels of the World.

Recognition has been accumulating in recent years: besides his ranking in the 50 Best, he was awarded his second Michelin star in 2012, he was the first non-French chef to be named “revelation of the year” in the influential Gault et Millau guide and, in 2012, he was made a “*chevalier de l’ordre des Arts et des Lettres*,” a prestigious French honor recognizing exceptional achievement in the cultural domain.

Gastronomy is a craft par excellence and Mirazur shows that locality, warmth and culture are values that count for independent luxury companies.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, Mirazur and Noma are not alone, as the slow food,<sup>19</sup> and the “Renaissance des Appellations,”<sup>20</sup> movements attest.

Let’s now explore the revival of a legend of the seas.

## Thomas Mercer, sailing a legend

At the Hotel de Paris in Monte Carlo, on 20 September 2012, a legend was reborn. Thomas Mercer, specialists in marine chronometers since the mid-1850s, launched their ‘Thomas Mercer Classis’ in collaboration with renowned designer Andrew Winch.

Before going into this renaissance, let’s take a closer look at the beginning of this incredible adventure. Thomas Mercer was the clockmaker and entrepreneur behind Thomas Mercer Chronometers (TMC), a company founded in England in 1858. With a reputation for innovation, craftsmanship and accuracy, TMC rapidly became successful, being appointed maker to the Admiralty and even producing timepieces for the British royal family and the marine chronometers that equipped HMY *Britannia*.



**FIGURE 3.12** Reverse angle from Thomas Mercer “Calibre TM0801”. Courtesy of Thomas Mercer

A marine chronometer is a timepiece that remains accurate during long sea voyages despite changes in temperature, pressure, humidity and other challenging conditions aboard ship; it can be used to determine longitude, and thus serve as a navigational device. In the 18th century the British government, realizing the importance of such a device to help save time and loss of life – this being a period of numerous naval disasters – offered a monetary reward to anyone who could produce an adequate timekeeper. The first marine chronometer, called the H1, was developed in 1737 by John Harrison, a British clockmaker. Harrison dedicated another 30 years to perfecting the device, creating a chronometer, the H4, that was accurate to less than half a degree. He was awarded the Longitude Prize in 1761.

It was in this highly competitive and lucrative world of marine chronometers that Thomas Mercer worked and succeeded. Building on the creations of Harrison, TMC went on to develop and perfect chronometers. Mercer’s son, Frank Mercer, went on to win first prize in the Greenwich Trials in 1911 with the Mercer 8306. Perhaps TMC’s greatest legacy, however, was to equip Shackleton’s ship *Endurance* for its trans-antarctic expedition (1914–17).

The *Endurance* got trapped in ice, was destroyed and the crew spent 22 months in Antarctica. Shackleton was able to lead all of his crew to safety using his Thomas Mercer chronometer on the survival journey, an open-boat trip from Elephant Island to South Georgia. This chronometer is now on permanent display at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, London.

The generations that followed in Thomas Mercer's footsteps achieved an unprecedented level of success, and the company produced over 31,000 chronometers (approximately 20,000 more than the second leading maker). As well as producing chronometers under the Thomas Mercer brand name, the company also made chronometers for over 370 other makers – several of which were also successful at the Greenwich Trials.

The demise of the company only came with the development of satellite navigation technologies. Global positioning system (GPS) put an end to this first phase of the company's adventures and Thomas Mercer Chronometers closed its doors in 1984.

The company's renaissance began in 2007 when the brand was acquired by Alessandro Quintavalle and given a second life. Key to the success of this renaissance was the continued involvement of the Mercer family – a fifth-generation member holds a position on the board.

Five years of development resulted in the creation of the "Classis" marine chronometer. This state-of-the-art timepiece combines a proven mechanism – the Calibre TM0801 – in the form of a spring detent escapement and introduces the ovalizing balance, a solution featuring a bar which does not expand or contract with changes in temperature and which forces the balance into an oval shape. This, coupled with an uncut rim which makes centrifugal errors practically disappear, leads to a considerable reduction in residual and "middle temperature" errors.

Given the advances in GPS technology that originally led to the closure of the Thomas Mercer company, it may be legitimate to ask whether such a timepiece, however accurate and reliable, would find a market. How should a brand position itself if its core functional technology is no longer required?

The answer is that the Classis is not simply a navigational device; it is a "revolutionary design object, set to grace the interiors of the world's finest yachts,"<sup>21</sup> while continuing the tradition of engineering and design excellence of the marine chronometer.

The partnership with the award-winning yacht designer, Andrew Winch, is pivotal. The Classis combines Thomas Mercer engineering heritage with

Winch's exquisite style. This first limited edition, which was launched during the 2012 Monaco Yacht Show in a world premiere, consisted of a run of only ten pieces, each with a catalogue price of £265,000.

The 2013 Monaco Yacht Show was again the venue for the next Thomas Mercer launch. The Thomas Mercer "Legacy," whose case displays an asymmetrical body of AISI 316 stainless steel with precious elements in high-gloss Zircote, makes its debut with the "Shackleton Epic," a limited-edition run of 25, celebrating Shackleton's hazardous journey.

Where is the company heading as of 2015? Building brand equity, answers Alessandro Quintavalle, and opportunistically looking for partnerships: 2014 saw the introduction of the "Legacy Black," a timekeeper that is an uncompromising statement of modernity and innovation. Featuring a stunning combination of diamond-like carbon (DLC), Côtes de Genève and all-black finishing this new chronometer propels the brand to the very cutting edge of modern horology, blending timelessness with fine craftsmanship.



**Figure 3.13** Thomas Mercer "Legacy Black" marine chronometer. Courtesy of Thomas Mercer



In 2014 Thomas Mercer was also appointed official timekeeper of the Cortina d'Ampezzo Yacht Club, a one-of-a-kind association that, in the exclusive and luxurious setting of the Pearl of the Dolomites, reinforces the sea/mountain duality unique to the brand.

It will be no less thrilling for the company in 2015 with the launch of the "Observatory," an extraordinary and inimitable piece that will mark the entrance of Thomas Mercer in the ultra-prestigious *Grande Complication* segment, the elite of high-end horology; perpetual calendar, equation of time, *detent-tourbillon* escapement, 30-day power reserve and 24 time-zone jumping hours are just some of the intricacies of this incomparable timekeeper.



**FIGURE 3.14** Thomas Mercer "Observatory" marine chronometer. Courtesy of Thomas Mercer

Finally, drawing inspiration from the brand's dashing heritage, it will reinvent the table chronometer, now a timepiece to grace the interiors of the world's finest homes: sharing with the Classis, Legacy and Observatory the same precision engineering and design excellence, but claiming its own individual and

audaciously contemporary style, this new model will be a delight for horological collectors.

The brand values are the guiding light in Thomas Mercer's continuing journey: exclusivity, heritage, high aesthetics, British excellence and innovation. It is interesting to note that the renaissance of Thomas Mercer was accompanied by innovation and excellence at the highest level representing an example of *meta-luxury*, a concept coined by Manfredi Ricca and Rebecca Robins from Interbrand:<sup>22</sup> meta-luxury "is a paradigm resurrecting authentic art and science, and bringing together craftsmen and connoisseurs rather than manufacturers and consumers. It is about *métiers*, numbered series and ateliers, rather than positioning, volumes and networks. It is about signatures as we knew them rather than luxury brands as we have been accustomed to know them. Ultimately, it is about a culture in itself, based on the quest for the absolute."<sup>23</sup> Ricca and Robins define meta-luxury as "an enterprise paradigm based on knowledge, purpose and the pursuit of timelessness, ultimately embodied in a unique achievement."<sup>24</sup>

It is also interesting to note – in these times of "Europe bashing"<sup>25</sup> – that it is in Europe that this paradigm is taking its roots and finding a natural space for development. Truly, luxury pillars of craftsmanship (how?), focus (what?), history (when?) and rarity (to whom?) are (re)taking center stage.

Ricca and Robins go on to assert that in this paradigm the business results are not a target, they are the means to fund the ongoing pursuit of unique achievement. Meta-luxury is thus a different strategic choice and business model, where it is the brand that drives the business. The authors cite Hermès as a paramount case of meta-luxury, along with smaller companies such as the fragrance maker Maison Francis Kurkdjian, the piano manufacturer Fazioli and the auto maker Pagani Automobili. Meta-luxury could be considered a business model innovation, although it is perhaps better described as companies going back to the roots of luxury. This certainly requires a different strategy and business model from the one currently adopted by mainstream luxury companies, where quarterly profit reports dominate the agenda.

Let's now briefly observe how independent watchmaking brands Louis Moinet and Slyde, despite being poles apart, are both turning toward innovation.