



JOUX VALLEY: «ESPACE HORLOGER»

250 years of history in a hi-tech museum

On 25 May, the new «Espace horloger» of the Joux Valley opened its doors to 250 years of history.

In 1917, 95 years ago, Zenith had two factories built in the Joux Valley, one in Les Charbonnières, the other in Le Sentier. Ten years later the manufactory of Le Sentier changed hands and became the property of Jacques David LeCoultre, who named it L'Essor. For around 30 years the firm grew its business on the site before moving to its current location in La Golisse. In 1979, the commune of Le Chenit bought this old building for use as a cultural centre, a role it retained until 1995. At the initiative of several impassioned lecturers at Joux Valley Technical College, the Museum of Watchmaking came into being in 1996. Comté clocks, old models and contemporary timepieces were then exhibited alongside the Praz-Rodet mammoth skeleton discovered during

excavations in the region. Despite the diversity of the museum's exhibits, interest in L'Essor faded and it eventually closed its doors to the public.

Over a period of eight months, the museum was revitalised under the impulse of entrepreneur Vincent Jaton. His ambition was to revive the vocation of watch museum and spark interest among members of the public aged 7 to 77, be they enthusiasts or new to the world of horology. He also wanted to create a space that gave pride of place to training and apprenticeships, in order to restore value and prestige to watchmaking skills on the verge of disappearing forever. With support from the Paul-Edouard Piguet Foundation, the canton of Vaud,



communes, the French-speaking lottery, the Göhner Foundation, firms active in the Joux Valley and private partners, the budget of 1.4 million francs was raised and work began in May last year.

The first floor is devoted essentially to the discovery of watchmaking skills, 24 in total, presented in an original way using modern interactive and informative media. Three interactive tables with object recognition software allow visitors to immerse themselves in different watchmaking skills. Three fields of application are presented: the movement, the watch exterior, decoration and finishing. Those eager to learn more, informed by photos, videos and data sheets, will be able to download information onto their mobile phones using the QR code or have it sent to their own email address. For the more technically-minded, the Ludotemps gives visitors the opportunity to assemble a mechanical movement and case it up, also through the medium of touch screens. Occupying a central position on this floor, a workshop will periodically feature students from Joux Valley Technical College who will present their know-how. Filmed by two micro-cameras, their actions will be visible on screens. Also on the first floor is a temporary exhibition dedicated to the «school-watches» made by every student of Joux Valley Technical College at the end of their course. Timepieces manufactured by great Joux Valley watchmakers such as Philippe Dufour, Albert Piguet, Gérard Dubois and Georges Monnier will be on show for a limited period.

A cinema presents a 3D film recounting the history of the Joux Valley, not only from a watchmaking perspective but also in terms of the region's general craft activities. Meanwhile a shop offers a wide range of watchmaking books, DVDs, souvenirs, etc.

Lastly, the upper floor houses several collections of timepieces from all over the world, including the Gideon and Albert Jean collections. The Joux Valley is of course handsomely represented by both historic and contemporary timepieces. Technology is also evident in this space, which has digital tablets enabling visitors to find information relevant to each exhibit in three languages (French, German and English).

Curator and cultural mediator Dave Grandjean is delighted at the prospect of welcoming future visitors, be they from the Joux Valley or other Swiss cantons – Joux Valley Tourism hopes to include the Museum of Watchmaking in the tourist itinerary between Geneva, Lucerne and Interlaken – and from abroad (the museum will also be promoted in Asia).

«L'Espace horloger» is open in the summer (May to October) from Tuesday to Sunday, 10:30am to 5:30pm; in winter (November to April), also from Tuesday to Sunday, 1pm to 5pm. Entrance: 12 francs (adults), 6 francs (children). It should also be noted that the museum is accessible to people with reduced mobility.

