
“I ALWAYS WANTED TO DESIGN AN ULTRA-PURE, THREE-HAND BIG PILOT’S WATCH.”

IWC Creative Director Christian Knoop discusses the significance the Big Pilot’s Watch has for him and what fuels its iconic status. He also explains what motivated the development of the Big Pilot’s Watch 43, and looks back on the challenges of the design process.

What is the significance of the Big Pilot’s Watch for you personally?

I must admit that the Big Pilot’s Watch is probably the reason I joined IWC. When the ‘Big Pilot’s Watch Ref. 5002’ was released in 2002, it immediately caught my attention with its pure and crisp design. As a designer, I was impressed by the uncompromising execution of the ‘form follows function’ principle. The large case, oversized conical crown, easily legible dial; every detail is there for a reason. The Big Pilot’s Watch also illustrates IWC’s strategy to establish Pilot’s Watches in the context of luxury watches, a process that was started in the early 1990s. Combining the functional design of the brand’s military watches with contemporary mechanical movements was a broad and visionary step all those years ago. In doing so, IWC set in motion a trend that is now very common within the watch industry.

What underpins the iconic status of the Big Pilot’s Watch?

No other Pilot’s Watch combines such a recognisable design DNA with so many different creative executions. Over the years, almost 80 special editions have been released. Some paid tribute to famous personalities, like the Big Pilot’s Watch Edition ‘Muhammad Ali’. Others were charged with emotional stories; the Le Petit Prince Unique Piece was worn by IWC brand ambassador

Bradley Cooper at the 91st Academy Awards® and then auctioned to benefit the Antoine de Saint-Exupéry Youth Foundation. The Big Pilot’s Watch has been issued in almost every material imaginable, from white gold and platinum to ceramic and carbon, and has accommodated many different IWC complications like the perpetual calendar. This enormous variety not only fuelled its emblematic status but also illustrates IWC’s inventive spirit and creative approach.

What was the motivation for developing the Big Pilot’s Watch 43?

After releasing so many different versions of the Big Pilot’s Watch, we were aware of this model’s iconic status. But we also realised that it has its limits when it comes to ergonomics. Many people love the design, but they cannot strap a 46-millimetre timepiece on their wrist. For this reason, we decided to complement our portfolio with a new version with a more ergonomic case size. Another aspect that intrigued us was the opportunity to return to the extreme purity of the original 1940s design and create a simple three-hand watch with no other elements on the dial. The idea of an ultra-pure Big Pilot’s Watch, without a power reserve display and a date window, had been the topic of conversations within the IWC community for many years. Personally, I always wanted to design a three-hand Big Pilot’s Watch.

What are the characteristics of the Big Pilot's Watch 43?

With the Big Pilot's Watch 43, we have distilled the pure essence of the iconic design created more than 80 years ago. It just features a simple three-hand dial without any additional elements. We have gently reworked and improved every detail, such as the case size and proportions, the proportions of the crown, the dial graphics and the shape of the hands. Despite the reduced size, the 43-millimetre case combines a bold look with great wearing comfort. Another feature is the EasX-CHANGE system which allows you to change the strap quickly. We offer an attractive choice of calf leather and rubber straps in different colours and, for the first time, a metal bracelet. The Big Pilot's Watch 43 is powered by our in-house 82100 calibre. This high-end automatic movement features IWC's legendary Pellaton winding system, reinforced by ceramic components, which can be viewed through a sapphire glass case back.

What were the main challenges when developing the new model?

One of the main challenges was to strike a balance between wearability and wrist presence. We wanted the new model to be easy to wear but still look and feel like a Big Pilot's Watch. Early in the development process, we worked with different prototypes between 42 and 44 millimetres to define the perfect case proportions and ratio between diameter and thickness. Starting with 3D-printed prototypes, we quickly moved into metal prototypes to get a more realistic impression. Another challenge was the dial design, which was incredibly hard to get right. We experimented with different line thicknesses and font sizes and tried various finishes for the dial and the hands. The number of prototypes we made was crazy. In the end, what looks simple and effortless is always extremely hard to achieve.

Why did you integrate a EasX-CHANGE system?

Over the years, we have seen that many people customise their Big Pilot's Watches, mostly by using different straps. This underscored both the versatility of the design and

also our customers' desire to express their style and personality. What's more, nowadays people are looking for a versatile timepiece that can be taken into the water or worn in a more rugged environment. For this reason, we created the Big Pilot's Watch 43 with a practical and easy-to-use EasX-CHANGE system. In addition to calf leather straps with white stitching and four rivets, we also offer a choice of sporty and colourful rubber straps and a newly developed stainless steel bracelet.

What considerations went into developing the new metal bracelet?

For the first time in its 80-year history, we are presenting the Big Pilot's Watch on a stainless steel bracelet. We put a lot of time and effort into developing a bracelet that not only matches the iconic design but also fits nicely into the overall Pilot's Watches collection. The five-link execution adds to the design's purity and gives the watch a crisp and contemporary look. Beautifully shaped links combining polished and satin-finished surfaces have a visible presence and nicely reflect the light. The fine adjustment system makes the bracelet easy to adjust and comfortable to wear. Combined with the now 10 bar water-resistant case, the bracelet offers a new sports functionality and provides a fresh and original look.

Why the open case back and not a soft iron inner cage?

Many of our Pilot's Watches are historically associated with a soft-iron inner case that protects the movement against magnetic fields, a function that was originally developed for the Mark 11. This navigation watch was engineered to fit the stringent requirements of the British Royal Air Force back in 1948. While the 46-millimetre Big Pilot's Watch has this feature, we decided to release the Big Pilot's Watch 43 with a smaller case, a reduced case height and a sapphire glass back. Many of our customers appreciate the fact that they can observe the in-house movement at work.

IWC SCHAFFHAUSEN

In 1868, the American watchmaker and entrepreneur Florentine Ariosto Jones travelled from Boston to Switzerland and founded the 'International Watch Company' in Schaffhausen. His visionary dream was to combine advanced American manufacturing methods with the craftsmanship of Swiss watchmakers to make the best pocket watches of his time. In doing so, he not only laid the foundation for IWC's unique engineering approach but also established the centralised production of mechanical watches in Switzerland.

Over its 150 year history, IWC Schaffhausen has developed a reputation for creating functional complications, especially chronographs and calendars, which are ingenious, robust, and easy for customers to use. A pioneer in the use of titanium and ceramics, IWC today specialises in highly engineered technical watch cases manufactured from advanced materials, such as titanium-aluminide and Ceratanium®. Preferring the principle of "form follows function" over decoration, the Swiss watch manufacturer's timeless creations embody their owners' dreams and ambitions as they journey through life.

IWC sources materials responsibly and takes action to minimise its impact on the environment, creating intrinsically sustainable timepieces that are built to last for generations. The company prides itself in training its own future watchmakers and engineers, as well as offering an excellent working environment for all employees. IWC also partners with organisations that work globally to support children and young people.

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