



## THE GRÖNEFELD BROTHERS

*Dutch brothers Bart and Tim Grönefeld, both veterans of WOSTEP and Audemars Piguet (Renaud et Papi), launched their watch brand in 2004. They achieved acclaim with their dead beat seconds watch the One Hertz, and last year won a GPHG award for their Parallax Tourbillon. QP spoke to Bart on the eve of Grönefeld's return to SalonQP*

**QP: Your most recent watch, the Parallax Tourbillon, won last year's GPHG award for a tourbillon watch. What effect has that had?**

**Bart Grönefeld:** It's been fantastic. It has given us a lot of publicity, but perhaps more importantly it's given confidence to our customers and our future customers that it's not just a marketing story we tell. When true experts and professionals look at what you do and reward it, it tells people it's worth going into the adventure of buying a Grönefeld.

**QP: How did the idea of the Parallax Tourbillon come about?**

**BG:** It took about three years to develop. My brother Tim, he loves tourbillons, and we've built many tourbillons for many different customers. And every time we'd think "okay, another tourbillon cage at 6 o'clock in a precision instrument for which you cannot set the time correctly, because the tourbillon doesn't stop."

With a precision instrument you should be able to stop the cage. And we wanted to have a

large seconds hand to show this precision, so we came up with the idea of adding another wheel and pinion to add a direct drive to the cage.

The other thing that's important is that it's durable, which is why we used stainless steel in the tourbillon cage and bridges. Steel is naturally much harder to finish, and takes a lot longer in the finishing process – but because it's more durable, it's less likely to come back to after-sales too soon, so we get that time back.

**QP: Is it hard working with your brother? What are your different responsibilities?**

**"My brother is my best friend; if we have an argument it's settled over a cup of coffee – or about 20 beers!"**

**BG:** My brother is also my best friend – we could have been twins, but there's three years between us. We have a very good relationship, and we sit right opposite each other at the bench. If we ever have an argument it's usually settled over a cup of coffee – or about 20 beers!

We see things the same way: we love traditional watchmaking, we hate all those modern materials like carbon fibre and titanium – we think those are just marketing talk. We want to make watches that last hundreds of years.

**QP: You and Tim grew up in a family of watchmakers and jewellers. Did you both always know you'd become watchmakers?**

**BG:** We were both very much into mechanics since we were five or six years old. Our parents had a jeweller's shop, selling watches that of course needed servicing, and we were meant to take over the business one day. So we both became watchmakers, and we both studied watchmaking in the Netherlands; first me, then Tim.

The Gronefeld brothers Tim (left) and Bart (right) at their workshop in Oldenzaal, in the Netherlands





The Grönefeld Parallax  
Tourbillon picked up the  
GPHG award in 2014 for  
Best Tourbillon Watch



Left: Examining the One Hertz movement

Below left: The Parallax Tourbillon, updated this year in platinum

Bottom: The Grönefeld workshop

## Essentials

### Grönefeld Parallax Tourbillon

**Price:** £130,950  
**Material:** Platinum with sterling silver and red gold frosted dial  
**Calibre:** Hand-wound in-house movement with flying tourbillon and hacking seconds  
**Diameter:** 43mm  
**Number of parts:** 278  
**Power reserve:** 72 hours  
**Limited:** 5 pieces



To be honest, after I finished Dutch watchmaking school I wasn't so into it. But then I went to WOSTEP in Switzerland, and that's what really opened my eyes to fantastic watches and the possibilities of all this. This was pre-internet, so there was so much I hadn't discovered. My teacher was a collector of watches, and I just wanted to know more.

**QP: You worked at Asprey in London, and in 1991 you were hired by Renaud & Papi, just before it became part of Audemars Piguet, where Tim joined you.**

**So did a whole host of future greats of watchmaking, including Stephen Forsey, Peter Speake-Marin, Andreas Strehler...**

**BG:** And so many of those guys were non-Swiss, like us. I was there from 1991 to 1998, and Tim was there from 1993. I called Stephen Forsey and told him to come; Stephen called Peter Speake-Marin. You see, we were really learning all the time, not just earning a pay cheque. It made you feel like you wanted to be part of this amazing thing, and to be recognised yourself. At that time Renaud & Papi was making movements for people like

Cartier, Franck Muller – a lot of very high-end brands. And the thing is, once you do the high-end like that, you don't ever want to go back.

**QP: You returned to the Netherlands in 1998, and started your own brand in 2004. Was it hard establishing a Dutch brand?**

It still is hard to get that attention, and I'm sure if we were Swiss-made, things would have been much easier. We have to fight harder, be different and be creative – it's a double challenge for us. But we're happy – we make about 40 watches a year, we sell enough, every

**“Collectors at the very top end get a bit bored with the traditional stuff, and come looking to people like us”**

year a bit more, and we don't have a big plan to increase by a percentage each year.

**QP: There are a lot of top-end independent brands around now. Is it very competitive, or do you all get along?**

**BG:** Many of our customers collect other independent brands as well, and it's a growing market. When I started out, there were almost no mechanical watches out there, and maybe a thousand people seriously collecting nice watches. Now there are hundreds of thousands of people spending serious money, and at the top of that group they get a bit bored with the traditional stuff, and come looking to people like us.

It's funny – sometimes they even ask us for advice on other independent brands. So I just tell them about *our* new watch of course! But we don't really feel it's competition – it's creating a culture around all this, and we're reinforcing each other.

**QP: Who else do you admire?**

**BG:** The Netherlands and the UK are similar in having very little watchmaking culture – it's just us and Christian van der Klaauw here. So I really admire Roger Smith for having the balls to do very traditional watchmaking in the UK. And Greubel Forsey, Kari Voutilainen, Philippe Dufour, for their finishing in particular.

**QP: What are you planning next?**

**BG:** I can give you a few hints. We're going to be presenting a new watch a couple of weeks or so before Baselworld next year. It's a new and elegant case shape that's brand new for us. It'll be a bit thinner and smaller than the One Hertz and the Parallax, but with a very nice complication.