



HANS WILSDORF VISIONARY PAR EXCELLENCE

Few individuals can be said to have been both of their time and ahead of their time. And yet, Hans Wilsdorf, visionary entrepreneur and founder of Rolex, was precisely that. The prodigious and prolific innovator, who died in 1960, passed on an invaluable legacy to watchmaking in general and to Rolex in particular.



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Today, it is impossible to imagine a world where the wristwatch is not common currency. Yet, that was the case in 1905. Times were however changing. Lifestyles and dress codes as well. Hans Wilsdorf, only 24, “convinced of its enormous potential in a sports-minded country... like Great Britain”, was determined to create a wristwatch as robust and reliable as the pocket watch, then the order of the day.

No easy task. Precision had yet to be perfected in a case of such minuscule proportions, as he distinctly reminds us: “At that period, the wristlet watch was... an object of derision. Watchmakers all over the world remained sceptical as to its possibilities and believed this new-fangled object was bound [for] failure.”

THE ONE AND ONLY

It was Hans Wilsdorf’s unbridled daring and determination that led to the wristwatch becoming the norm across the globe and catapulted the Rolex brand to the distinguished position it has occupied in the watchmaking world for over a century.

As early as 1914, in a letter from a body of lifelong and lively correspondence, the resolute Hans Wilsdorf proclaimed: “We want to be the first... and the Rolex watch should be regarded as the one and only, the best!”

Indeed, not only did Hans Wilsdorf shape our perception of the wristwatch its place, its purpose and its potential. He also made Rolex a cornerstone of fine watchmaking by consistently upholding values that defy time: quality, passion and excellence. To this day, that very spirit, fired as much by dedication and perseverance as by foresight and imagination, permeates every Rolex workshop, every research laboratory, every department, confirming what Hans Wilsdorf knew to be true from the very start: “Originality and quality [must be] our slogan for the future in every country. Every [Rolex] watch must be an ambassador of quality.”

ZEST AND ZEITGEIST

Hans Wilsdorf’s uncanny ability to take the pulse and set the pace of his times, respond proactively and with incomparable deftness, and anticipate customers’ evolving needs translated into an unprecedented number of firsts for the brand and for the industry. From the first chronometer certifications awarded to Rolex watches to the Oyster, the world’s first waterproof wristwatch; from the Perpetual rotor to the Professional watch models. “Rolex must continuously strive to think and act differently from the rest. Therein lies my greatest strength,” wrote Hans Wilsdorf.



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That non-stop spirit of enterprise and innovation extended to every conceivable domain, from intellectual property – and the wisdom of coining, filing and registering, as early as 1908, the brand name “Rolex” – to avant-garde marketing, communications and sponsorship strategies.

VISION AND VALUES

By adhering tenaciously to the traditional values he held dear, ever vigilant in the present and continuously imagining the future, Hans Wilsdorf created a truly timeless brand, at once classic and contemporary, and found a virtually magical formula for perpetuity, the very alchemy of the Rolex brand. At 70 plus, Hans Wilsdorf displayed the same unflagging spirit of his early years: “I am over 75 years old. However, I am still full of enthusiasm for the watchmaking cause, to which I regularly contribute fresh ideas.”

BOLDNESS AND BEAUTY

No doubt, Hans Wilsdorf’s resounding message to us today would be the self-same message of yesteryear: “Step boldly. Success demands courage and iron will.” But, above all, “produce nothing but beautiful work.”