

A CUT ABOVE WATCHES



At far left, the Pita Caroussel, an automatic watch with a movement that turns with the hour hand, once every 12 hours. At near left, the Pita Oceana divers watch, which is water-resistant to a depth of 5,000 meters. The Pita Oceana has a waterproof case with no openings, eliminating weak spots where water could enter.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF DANIEL JIMÉNEZ, PITA BARCELONA

Carving a niche for 'made in Spain'

BARCELONA

Self-taught maker starts with local boutique and now caters to the globe

BY KRISTEN MCTIGHE

Born in a country where there is little watch-making tradition, the Spanish designer Aniceto Jiménez Pita's passion for innovation in watches stands out.

"I've always wanted to amaze people with my innovations and I absolutely love it when people see my watches and ask how such things are even possible," Mr. Jiménez Pita, 64, a self-taught master mechanical watchmaker, said in an interview at his office here. "They are even more surprised when they see that it was a Spaniard who did it."

A member of the elite Académie Horlogère Des Créateurs Indépendants

(AHCI), he has gained international recognition through his innovation and creativity while attempting to carve out a place for Spain in the world of independent watchmakers with the luxury brand he founded in 2005, Pita Barcelona.

"His watches are different from anything we've ever seen and he is very imaginative," said Sven Anderson, a founding member of the AHCI, who oversaw his work as he applied to become a member in 2004. "And when we choose a candidate, they must be able to make mechanical advancements. This he was absolutely able to do."

With the help of his son, Daniel Jiménez, a 33-year-old former information technology consultant with a master's degree in computer science and an M.B.A. who serves as the company's general manager, Mr. Jiménez Pita has been able to focus on creating and innovating. The business, which began with a few loyal Spanish customers out

of his watch repair and jewelry boutique in Barcelona, has gained customers across the globe. His timepieces have been shown in places like Basel, Madrid, Paris, Tokyo and Vienna.

"I knew he had the talent, that he had something special, and I knew I could take care of the business side," said Daniel Jiménez, who has also harnessed the use of social media sites like Facebook, where customers have posted underwater photos from Hawaii to the Indian Ocean with their Pita Barcelona timepieces. "I've seen other watchmakers who are incredible geniuses fail because they don't know how to run a business, and I didn't want that to happen."

Mr. Jiménez Pita grew up in a small village in Extremadura, a region in western Spain, during difficult economic times under General Francisco Franco's rule. He began fixing any clock or watch he could get his hands on, sometimes in exchange for a snack. By



the age of 11, he had made his first creation, a water clock in which he replaced water with oil.

For Mr. Jiménez Pita, attempting to show the world that the impossible can be done through creative innovation has always been at the forefront of his brand's identity. He keeps paper and pen alongside his bed at night and the shelves and cardboard boxes crammed into his small office and work space are overflowing with mountains of sketch books, paper scraps, old napkins and even an old paper table cloth covered with sketched ideas for watch case designs.

Among the most popular of his innovations is his diving watch, Oceana, a watch that resists water to a depth of 5,000 meters, or 16,400 feet. Mr. Jiménez Pita has a patent for both its crownless time-setting device and its waterproof case with no orifices, both innovations that eliminate weak spots where water normally enters.

"Not a single brand of diving watches had even attempted to improve these parts where water can come in," he said. "How is it possible that they have so many people and all the resources at their disposal, but they haven't done anything?"

Mr. Jiménez Pita doesn't plan to stop there and says he wants to make a watch that can function down to a depth of more than 10,000 meters.

"I want a watch that can go to the bottom of the Mariana Trench," he said, referring to the location in the Pacific Ocean east of the Philippines, the world's deepest point.

He also says he has created the prototype for a watch called Twister, on which the hands move erratically in all directions, stopping at the correct horizontal position only when its owner raises a wrist to read the time.

Apart from his innovations, which have won multiple awards, his watches have impressed his colleagues with what they have described as a uniquely Mediterranean style. Many of his designs are influenced by the art and architecture of Barcelona, a city Mr. Jiménez Pita describes as modern and spilling with art. He has used the lines and structures of Antoni Gaudí's buildings and has even looked to the 1931 masterpiece of the surrealist painter Salvador Dalí, "The Persistence of Memory," which features images of soft melting pocket watches, for inspiration.

"Making a watch like those in the painting wouldn't work, but I've had the idea of making hands that move like Dalí's watches would if they came alive," he said.

Mr. Jiménez Pita also gives his customers the freedom to personalize their timepiece in every aspect of its creation. With the coming introduction of a new e-commerce Web site, Pita Barcelona will give customers across the globe the chance to pre-order the watches to their liking. Prices for a Pita Barcelona timepiece range from €4,000 to €25,000, or \$5,500 to \$34,700.

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Aniceto Jiménez Pita, above, a self-taught watchmaker, has gained international recognition for his creativity and inventiveness. His Oceana divers watch, initial sketches of which are seen at right, is a step toward a watch that can dive to 10,000 meters.

But with demand skyrocketing and a staff of only five people, Mr. Jiménez Pita limits the numbers he produces. Pita Barcelona made 60 Oceana watches last year and it is planning to make 99 this year. It makes 10 to 15 of the other types of watches each year. A customer can wait more than a year for a timepiece.

"The problem is that with no tradition of this kind in Spain and no one else who does what I do, finding help is almost impossible," said Mr. Jiménez Pita. In the past, he took on interns from Barcelona's IPFP Verge de la Mercè, the

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only watch-making school in Spain, but later stopped, because, he said, the students' coursework was geared toward repair rather than becoming master watchmakers.

And while the lack of tradition has brought challenges to Mr. Jiménez Pita and his son, they also see its opportunity.

"In a way, because there is no tradition, there is no one telling my father it can't be done this way or that way," said Daniel Jiménez. "Because of that, he has had all the opportunity in the world to be innovative and to create a tradition of his own."

