**One Collector’s View: Tattooist Mo Coppoletta On Watches (Especially De Bethune)**

Obsession.

It's trait common to many successful people and it often manifests itself as a near-pathological desire − at least in the eyes of those not sharing the passion − to learn as much about a particular subject as possible.

If this trait is caused by a gene, then there is no doubt that London-based, Italian-born tattooist Mo Coppoletta has this particular combination of DNA embedded into every cell in his body. He doesn't just like watches, he has studied them and understands them. And, perhaps even more importantly, he understands the people who make them.

"Whether collecting art or watches, when I fall in love with something, then I need to understand, I need to research deeply," Coppeletta explains. "You may have taste, but if that isn't backed up with knowledge then it is superficial."

When we sat down to talk at his studio, "The Family Business" in central London's Cleckenwell district (the city's historic "Little Italy"), Coppoletta was wearing a steel Audemars Piguet Royal Oak Perpetual Calendar Skeleton. "It's my summer watch," he commented as his eyes caught the direction of my gaze.

http://www.thefamilybusinesstattoo.com/studio/

The Family Business is lavishly decorated with Catholic iconography, not so much because of Coppoletta's personal beliefs, but because he feels that, "Religious iconography is just stupendous. Even if you are not a believer, if you walk into a church the symbolic power of the art just hits you."

I'd asked Coppoletta to bring along a few of his favorites, and in addition to the Royal Oak on his wrist, he had an Ulysse Nardin Sonata and two de Bethunes: a DB25 Starry Sky and a customized DB28. Needless to say, he immediately had my attention.

Coppoletta does not have a particularly large collection (around ten pieces) and he buys what he likes rather than focusing on a particular complication or style. However, his tastes are converging on one favorite brand that he feels ticks all of the boxes: De Bethune.

**An ~~Englishman~~ Italian in ~~New York~~ London**

But before we look at Coppoletta's wristwatches, it's worth having a look at how this young law student hailing from near Verona, Italy, came to London and became one of the world's leading tattooists and designers. He has inked celebrities and has collaborated with artists as diverse as Damien Hirst, Ralph Lauren, and Lady Gaga. He has also worked with Romain Jerome on a sailor tattoo-themed watch, the Tattoo DNA.

http://www.romainjerome.ch/2013/09/rj-romain-jerome-pays-tribute-to-maritime-legends-with-the-tattoo-dna-collection/

Not long before graduating with a law degree in Italy, Coppoletta decided that law just wasn't for him and he left to explore other fields. He had a few friends into tattoos and, as is his way, started to learn all he could about the subject. In particular the technical aspects of the art.

"It isn't just artistic ability; you need to understand the technical aspects because execution is important. You have to be technically good enough to execute your vision of the art."

Eventually friends told him that since he now knew so much about tattooing he should give it a go himself . . . so he did. And was smitten. This was in the 1990s and tattooing was much more of a fringe art than it is today. Coppoletta realized that if he wanted to learn more and get better − and he always wanted to learn more and get better − then he would have to leave relatively conservative Italy to study somewhere with a more liberal approach.

**London calling**

In 1997 Coppoletta moved to Cleckenwell in London, attracted by its central location and large Italian community, and found an apprenticeship with a respected tattooist. After three years he left to gain more experience with another tattooist and then in 2003, with a quickly growing reputation, went out on his own and opened The Family Business.

"I pushed my career and myself to be the best I could possibly be at tattooing. Pushed my technical ability, pushed my drawing ability, pushed my style, and pushed my aesthetics."

So far, so relatively straightforward you might think (as I did). But I was surprised to learn that before he started decorating people permanently with indelible ink, Coppoletta hadn't been much of an artist at all. Whereas many successful artists started sketching, painting, singing, or acting from childhood, Coppoletta only began in his twenties when he started tattooing.

He did, however, come from a background that instilled an appreciation for art, craft, and the finer things in life: Coppoletta's father was an antique dealer specializing in paintings and furniture. His mother was a tailor.

And while he had a passion for nice clothes, shoes and accessories, Coppoletta's obsessions did not include fine watches until. . . .

**Jaeger-LeCoultre Squadra World Chronograph: the game-changer**

In 2006, Coppoletta saw an Italian television review of the SIHH, and one watch in particular just blew him away: the Squadra World Chronograph by Jaeger-LeCoultre.

"My God, that watch. Boom! Full on! I went straight to the Jaeger-LeCoultre boutique in London and discovered the Master collection as well as the Reversos," he exclaimed.

It wasn't long before Coppoletta was learning all he could about his new-found love affair. He arranged a visit to Geneva where he was smitten with F.P. Journe.

"Obsession, obsession, obsession! Like starting tattooing: 24 hours a day, thinking about going to meet watchmakers. More things to learn, more meetings, finding people to arrange an SIHH pass, then Baselworld. Talking, talking, talking [watches]."

In 2009, the William & Son watch retailers in London organized a big get-together, and Coppoletta met Romain Gauthier (he is a big fan of Logical One) and had a chance to see the De Bethune collection in depth: that was love at first sight.   
http://www.williamandson.com/

"I am not emotionally moved by something if I cannot understand the [creation] process. Arts and crafts appeal to me much more when I can see and understand how something has been created."

**De Bethune**

While Coppeletta isn't a mono-brand collector just yet, if he had to select watches from just one brand then it would be De Bethune. "If I could only collect watches from De Bethune, I'd be perfectly happy," he admits.

"When they [De Bethune founders Denis Flageollet and David Zanetta] are together, they do not need to speak. They are like two symphonic orchestra directors that know the score. De Bethune is music; not just any music, beautiful music."

Coppeletta's first De Bethune was the sublime DB25L Starry Sky. And it's not difficult to understand why this particular model exerted such an attraction: beautiful manufacture movement; precise spherical moon phase good for 122 years; flame-blued hands; six-day power reserve with linear indicator on the back; and an ultra-soft leather strap.

"They [De Bethune] do the best straps; it is the best-guarded secret in the watch industry. Just amazing."

"This [DB25L Starry Sky] is my special events watch. It's wow!"

Naturally, Coppeletta took advantage of the special personalization option with the DB25L Starry Sky and had the celestial constellations on the dial charted for his time and place of birth.

Having been bitten by the De Bethune bug, a DB28 soon followed. This special edition unique piece was developed in conjunction with De Bethune to Coppeletta's specifications and features a pink gold and zirconium case, black moon, black outer dial ring, and no visible jewels on the dial side. He was after a luxurious feel and certainly got that as it is a quite an opulent watch.

"When I wear a De Bethune, I feel like I'm on top of the world,” he admits.

I don't think that there is better advice for any collector at any level of experience than Coppeletta's. "When you are investing your own money that you have worked hard for, it's important to put it where it gives you as much pleasure as possible." But to do that well takes obsession!