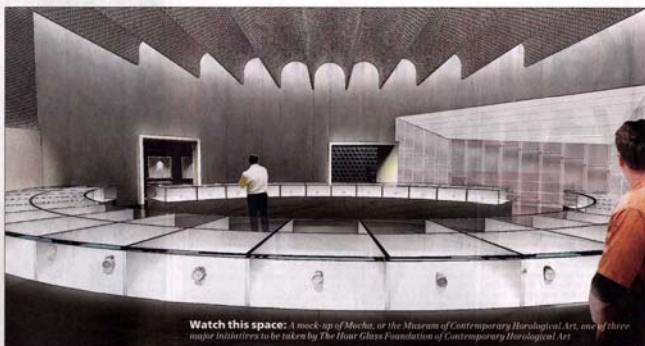


The art of fine watches

The Hour Glass plans a foundation in aid of the appreciation of finely made watches as works of art and not mere luxury consumer items. **LARRY WEE** finds out more



Watch this space: A mock-up of Mocha, or the Museum of Contemporary Horological Art, one of three major initiatives to be taken by The Hour Glass Foundation of Contemporary Horological Art.

LOCAL watch retailer The Hour Glass (THG) plans to inject two million Swiss francs (S\$2.5 million) into a foundation dedicated to the appreciation of horological art to be called Focha, or The Hour Glass Foundation of Contemporary Horological Art.

Explaining the underlying motivation for the move, THG executive director Michael Tay said that the demand for finely made watches can only grow more meaningfully over the longer haul if buyers learn to appreciate watches as valuable works of art rather than as mere consumption or lifestyle items. And, in order for that to happen, the universe of potential watch buyers out there has to be educated.

"The educational process is imperative in creating this culture of appreciation and THG has, over the past seven years, been investing in this ideal and injecting more body into the core of watch collecting," he said.

In this regard, many local watch collectors and enthusiasts most fondly recall Tempus — the Great Watchescape, organised by THG at the Raffles City Convention Centre here two years ago, which attracted something like 50,000 visitors, of which 8,000 were foreign.

A five-day extravaganza of everything horological, Tempus 2004 exhibited — and explained — \$120 million worth of watches from 35 brands, with no less than 110 hours of seminars and workshops. And in more good news for watch fans here, Mr Tay confirmed earlier this year that planning has already begun for Tempus II, slated for 2007.

Providing further details for Focha, Mr Tay explained that it will be the governing body for three major initiatives related to fine watch-making or *haute horlogerie* — A Museum of Contemporary Horological Art (Mocha); Public Education Programmes (or Peps); and an Hour Glass Foundation Prize for contemporary horological artists, artisans and entrepreneurs.

The last-mentioned, he explained to *The Business Times* recently, should be the most generous in international watch industry circles, valued at between 50,000 to 100,000 Swiss francs. This will, however, be awarded only as and when worthy recipients have been identified, which may not necessarily be on an annual basis. And THG's initial outlay of two million Swiss francs on Focha may well need to be topped up along the way, Mr Tay acknowledged.

As for Mocha, it will be unveiled in 2007 at Tempus II, and it is hoped that it will find a permanent home by 2009. Managed by a full-time curator and his team, it should house something like 8,000 square feet of exhibition space for collectors' timepieces from the past 30 years, with two 1,000 sq ft areas on the side for talks and hands-on watchmaking classes.

Singapore is the ideal place to launch the Focha initiative, Mr Tay said, since the republic is already home to some of the watch industry's most prolific and knowledgeable collectors, compact size notwithstanding.

"Singapore thus has a tremendous content advantage in terms of both knowledge capital and specialist watch artifacts and may even have reached the point where international watch companies regard their Singaporean clients as some of the world's opinion leaders on the subject of mechanical timepieces," he suggested.



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