

Nomos Glashütte's new building in Schlottwitz, just outside its main base in Glashütte, is designed to blend in with its surroundings. The facility centralises production of almost all components for the brand's 13 movements, and enhances its integrated approach to watchmaking



# UNITED FRONT

Discreet and efficient, Nomos Glashütte's new production facility reflects its founding values

PHOTOGRAPHY: MAX CREASY WRITER: JAMES GURNEY

Talking about Nomos Glashütte, it's tempting to start with the watch company's design office, Berlinerblau, in Berlin's Kreuzberg district. Located in a former button factory built in the early 1900s, the studio is all it should be: light flooding onto whitewashed walls covered in colour swatches, design details and mood boards, with Frank Gehry 'Cloud' lamps up above.

But, as Michael Paul, the company's head of design, insists, everything here refers back to how the watches are made. So you really have to start in Glashütte, 230km south of Berlin. It's here that the making happens and where the soul of the brand is found.

A one-industry town, Glashütte is celebrating 175 years of watchmaking. Nomos Glashütte, 30 years old, is in storied

company. Glance out of its offices in the old railway station and see A Lange & Söhne and Glashütte Original across the road, while Moritz Grossmann's atelier is up the hill. The town's first wave of watchmakers was part of a government attempt to relieve poverty after the failure of the local silver mines. Nomos Glashütte was founded in 1990 by Roland Schwertner as »

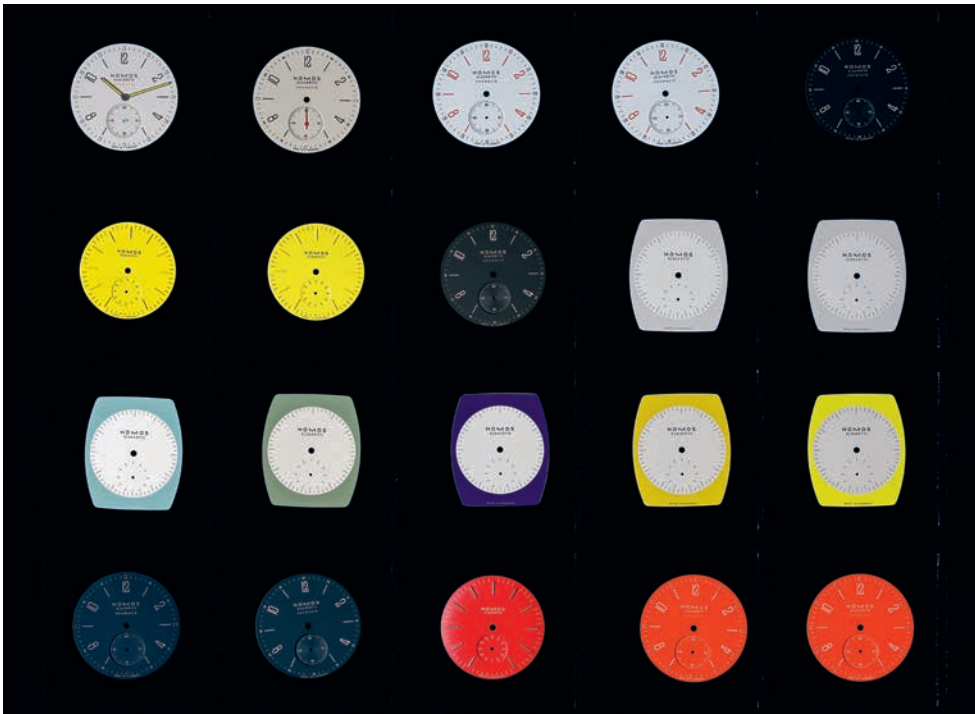


Left, the brand's main office in Glashütte's old railway station

Below, Tangente Neomatik 41 Update, £3,200, in white and ruthenium dial versions with Nomos Glashütte's DUW6101 self-winding movement. The movement

shows the winding rotor, 'three-quarter' plate and Nomos Glashütte's 'swing system' balance and escapement

Below left, prototype dials at the Berlin design studio show a distinctive approach to colour



facility just up the road from Glashütte in Schlottwitz. The timber-clad exterior blends with the forested valley. Inside, the facility has everything needed to produce the whole suite of components that go into the brand's 13 movements, save for the jewel-bearings and balance springs, which are sourced externally (electro-plating also happens off-site, to avoid contamination of a nearby river). The staff can quickly react to feedback from the watchmakers back in Glashütte, a real advantage when working at tolerances measured in fractions of a millimetre. But the building also works as an expression of the Deutscher Werkbund approach: state-of-the-art, multi-axis cutting machines sit next to equipment from the 1950s; finishing is by hand, but quality control uses the latest optical gear; every last filing is recycled and the climate control employs heat exchangers.

The brand's movements are designed to get the best out of the production system; escapement components (the wheel, balance spring, pallets and anchors at the heart of a watch) are made in minutely different sizes, so a balanced assembly can be made from parts at hand, rather than through adjusting each part to fit.

Back at the Berlinerblau, Paul emphasises the equality of production with design: 'Design and mechanics have to be considered together.' He says the Nomos Glashütte approach is to make watches for daily life, and in terms of design inspiration, 'it's not a question of looking for details to use, but of sensing the mood, what's in the air. This is why the design office is in Berlin rather than Glashütte.' That said, the watches still follow many design traditions of the brand's hometown, such as the three-quarter mainplate and blued hands. 'It is where we are from, our origins, and we must respect that,' says Paul. ✱ [nomos-glashuette.com](http://nomos-glashuette.com)

state-owned industries unravelled following the collapse of East Germany. It was a bold move for an IT expert and photographer from Düsseldorf with no prior experience of watchmaking (save for childhood visits to family in the town).

Nomos Glashütte has since grown to become the town's largest maker by volume, producing 20,000 watches a year. It has gained a strong following in the US, and won design and product awards including the Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève.

The brand is built around an industrial design philosophy that traces its roots back, via the Bauhaus, to the Deutscher Werkbund movement of the early 20th century, modelled in turn on the British Arts & Crafts movement. The Deutscher

Werkbund is still active and Nomos Glashütte joined in 1992, recognising shared values of honesty, quality, affordability and design that is detached from fashion. As the brand's own tome, *Nomos Glashütte - The Great Universal Encyclopaedia*, puts it 'the Werkbund aims to promote designers and use modern technology to create products that are both beautiful and affordable'.

The movement also emphasises the interplay between art, industry and craft and the equality of value each should have. In practice, you can see this in both the details of Nomos Glashütte watches and the way they are made. 'We work together at eye level,' as a production manager puts it.

Recent growth has seen the brand's component production centralised in a new