



THE SOUL BEHIND NOMOS IS MOST APPARENT IN ITS PEOPLE

THE WATCHMAKERS

BY NICK CARUSO
PHOTO BY HENRY PHILLIPS

Over its decades-long reign, the Berlin Wall robbed so much from so many. Family, freedom and prosperity — these precious parts of life were blocked by a tall, concrete-and-razor-wire barrier, by armed guards, by conflict. When the Cold War ended and the Iron Curtain fell, a flood of color washed over the parts of German culture and humanity that had been sapped into dry gray scale.

Before the Wall, Glashütte was the epicenter of German watchmaking. The tiny town, moments away from the Czech border, thrummed with watchmaking prowess: talent and skill that may have literally flowed in its resident's veins. "It's like a Glashütte gene; the watch gene," said Uwe Ahrendt, CEO of NOMOS. During the days of the German Democratic Republic, watchmaking in Glashütte slowed. But the gene did not die. It only went dormant.

"Luckily all the knowledge about watchmaking could be preserved throughout the forty years of GDR times," Ahrendt says. "They passed it on from generation to generation." When NOMOS was founded 26 years ago, just after the Wall crumbled, the gene was coming back to life in full force. "After the Wall came down, we needed some pioneers to come here and discover Glashütte again. To make it the place it is nowadays. We have ten watchmaking companies here, and every one of them has a different approach to watchmaking; they have a different philosophy, and they bring this philosophy, and their approach, into the world. And that's something that makes this town very special and unique."

Glashütte has a population of nearly 7,000, almost no restaurants and zero nightlife; just watchmaking companies and quiet streets. Yet because there are so many companies in such dense concentration, Ahrendt says, there is great variety in employment options. "There is a company for each and every person, so people pick the place they want to work at, depending on the feel that company has. If you want a bit more open-minded and independent thinking, you go to NOMOS."

NOMOS didn't restart its production or reimagine its brand after the Wall like other Glashütte brands did. It was founded in post-Wall 1990, offering it the advantage of beginning while others were trying to begin again. And it's continued on as a very serious brand that doesn't take itself too seriously. Over and over again, the people at NOMOS say that at the end of the day, a watch is a watch — a tool, not some vaunted jewel to be idolized. It should be beautiful and perfect, but have personality and be useful; it should have a soul.

This soul comes through so keenly, so beautifully in NOMOS watches: uniquely shaped cases and pristine movements; unexpected but extremely satisfying pops of color; details and complications with typography and flourishes you won't see on the other, older companies' offerings.

The watches are extraordinary, but the soul of NOMOS truly exists in the people that make up the company. NOMOS watchmakers are a sincerely bright, passionate lot. They love their work, their workplace; they are grateful to be able to make such masterpieces in such a beautiful setting. These are profiles of the people responsible for different steps in the NOMOS watchmaking process. These are the people with the Glashütte gene, the new guard of German watchmaking.



**HEIKE HAHN,
MASTER WATCHMAKER**

CONSTRUCTION
TECHNOLOGY SPECIALIST
SINCE 1998

I have a sister who is also a watchmaker who does service for all brands of watches. My grandfather was a watchmaker. He had a small workshop where my sister and I would run around and do little chores. And after the Wall came down, I went to school here. During that time I worked here at NOMOS.

In the beginning, working with NOMOS was like being with your family. There were very few people and everyone used to do everything. Over the last five years I especially realized that all of this has changed. We now work in groups, or departments, and not everyone does everything or knows everyone. There are many new employees that you don't get to know.

We worked on funny special editions like one for Lufthansa. We worked on two thousand watches in three days. It was crazy to do this. We'd sit until midnight — six of us building watches and listening to loud music and walking around for fresh air just to stay awake.



**TOBAIS HAAB,
TEAM LEADER**

COMPLICATIONS DEPARTMENT
SINCE 2012

[I wear the Zurich Worldtimer watch] because I used to work on this movement and the complications.

You develop a kind of relation to the piece. And I really like the blue color, rather than the silver-plated version. I'm wearing a piece that I probably worked on.

I actually need a lot of time to work on this complication. It's divided into two parts. One is like twenty-five minutes and the other is some twenty or eighteen minutes. And that's a long time to work on one thing, in comparison to tiny bits and pieces.

After I finished my normal school, I thought about being either a watchmaker or optician because I wanted to work with fine parts, but I realized as an optician you don't work that much on things. If I weren't working on watches I would work in the auto industry in industrial production — engines.

**HENRIK STOCK,
TEAM LEADER**

ESCAPEMENT DEPARTMENT
SINCE 2014

Since 2014 I adjust the balance spring, which takes one year to learn. You need to learn to do it the right way, and to do a large amount in the right way. So there are only two people at the moment who can really do it, and a third one who we are training. Once you're trained in it and have the right way to look at it, it's easy. But it takes a lot of time. It takes up to ten minutes before I'm finished with one.

This is a tool you cannot buy in a regular shop. We have to produce it ourselves. And I'm very particular about my tools. This is mine; no one should touch it.

I only come to Glashütte for work. I get up very early — at five. After work, there's not much to do here in Glashütte. You don't have a proper restaurant or anything else. It's impossible to work on a hangover here, so I have to be very fresh and refreshed [in the mornings].

It's quite exhausting. Sometimes I go on my motorbike to unwind. I have an old BMW that I fixed up completely.

I was a gardener, but then I had this motorbike accident. They had to remove part of my foot and I couldn't be down on the ground anymore. I had to change my whole work situation. So I went to school again and became a watchmaker. And there were other places where I could have gone, but I really wanted to come to NOMOS. I really love what I do, and working on my bike gives me a technical sense that helps me work here.





**LISANN EISERT,
TEAM LEADER**

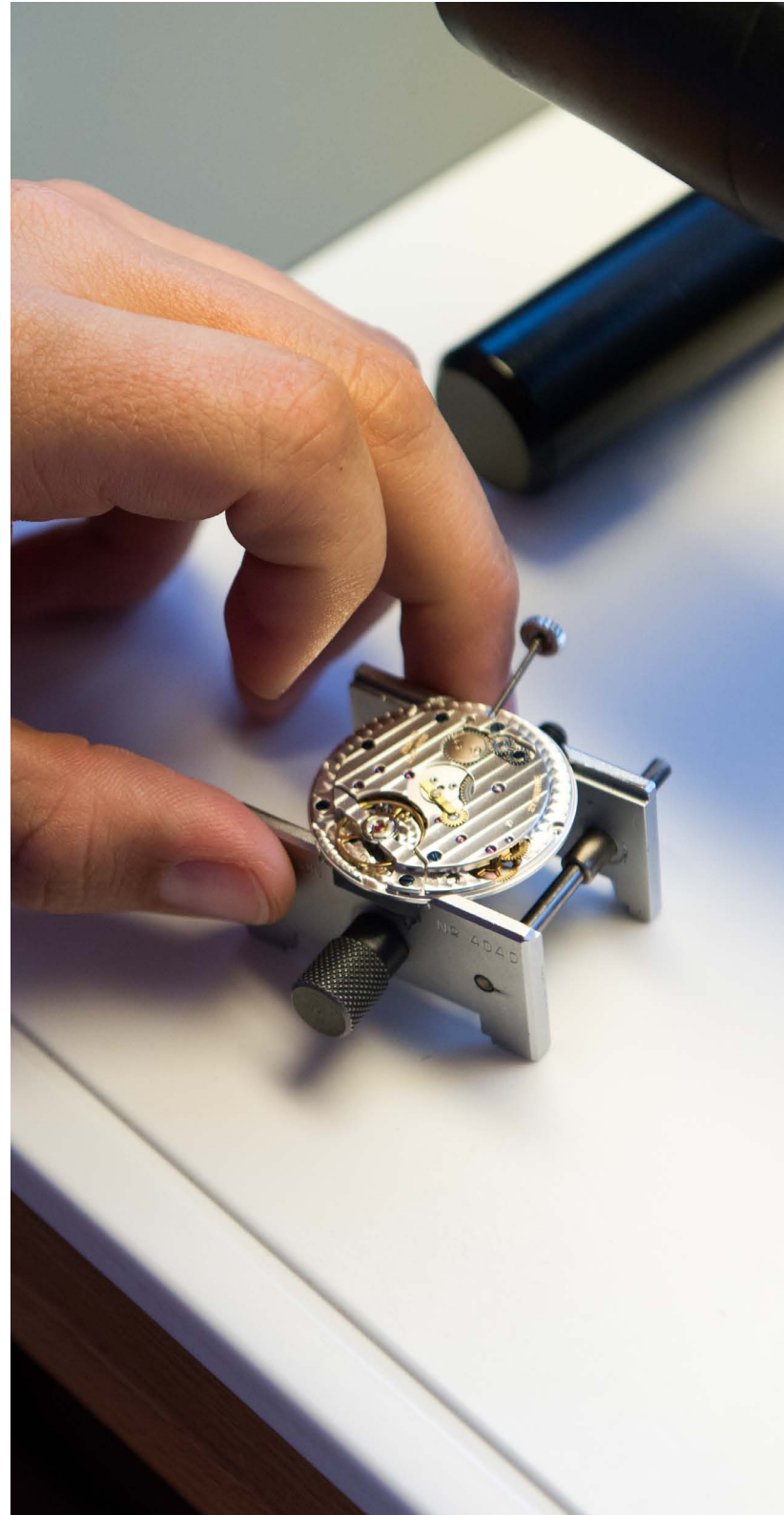
ADJUSTMENT DEPARTMENT
SINCE 2010

The movements get adjusted in six positions, because your wrist moves and you don't wear your watch in just one place. This is simulated by these machines.

I'm a person who always needs to fiddle around with things and play around with tiny things, so this is the ideal job for me. Working in an office would be a total horror for me.

When I was a child, I didn't care about watchmaking. I was into [European] football. My grandfather had a lot of mechanical watches at home. They were from Glashütte Original. And that's how I got in touch with watches. He was always working on these watches and it's what I found interesting.

The good thing about a watch is that it's always repairable. So even if you make a mistake, you can fix it.



KAI WISIAN

LATHE AND COG-CUTTING SHOP
SINCE 2001

I have lived here my whole life — for thirty-four years.

I do this from the heart, and like what I do. But there are days where I think, 'Oh, nothing works out and I should have stayed in bed.' But I really like my job.

Actually, I had to stop working as a roofer because of health problems with my back. My father and my grandfather were also tool-makers, making the tools that make the parts for watches, which is how I came to work in the watch industry, and here at NOMOS. It was a generational thing as well.

KERSTIN BOHLS

QUALITY CONTROL
SINCE 2016

Of course I have to make sure that everything is in order and looks perfect, but at the end of the day, this is my job, and I don't really see it as being so very neat and particular. In my private life I'm very relaxed. I can dust things or leave them be; I'm not too focused on everything being totally proper.

Every watch is like a small masterpiece that the watchmakers here create.

I worked in the auto industry before this. I was doing quality checks for a supplier, so I am very familiar with these processes. I liked my job there, but the big difference is that the watch has a soul. A lot of people have had it in their hands before it ends here, whereas in the auto industry, you have a huge machine, you take out a piece, you check it. It is soulless and anonymous. Here, I know the people who have worked on the watch.

I live in a small town near here, and we have a very nice lake. But I was born in Glashütte, so it's like destiny sending me back here. (Laughs)

After the fall of the Wall, Glashütte was really resurrected, or revived. During the GDR period, you didn't hear that much about Glashütte, whereas nowadays you read about it a lot in newspapers or magazines again. So it lives more, or breathes more, than it did before. It makes me proud because I was a child of the GDR times, and to see this develop in a different direction is a good thing.

