

THE NOMOS FLAIR

REVOLUTION *USA visits Nomos Glashütte in its two opposing homes, dynamic Berlin and methodical Glashütte, and finds out how the young brand makes the two work as one.*

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Uwe Arhendt, CEO of Nomos Glashütte, in front of their manufacturing headquarters in Glashütte, Germany.

Berlin collides. Those are my initial thoughts about the hustle and bustle of this city. History, identities, cultures — all on opposing sides of any spectrum — are colliding in tight quarters, with new developments being built on top of old ones. “Berlin was ripped apart and put back together, which you can see throughout the city, and since it’s quickly developed into a hub,” says Thomas Höhnel, product designer for Nomos Glashütte. And it was put back together, it seems, by a force of creative energy. The wall came down and a burst of technicolor creativity exploded, and it’s evident everywhere in Berlin.

The sheer amount of street art makes the city look like Banksy’s playground. Head to toe, Berlin is covered in something visual. It’s noisy with construction and bursting at the seams with people who are at least two seasons ahead of fashion’s latest trends. It’s no wonder Nomos decided to base its in-house design agency, Berlinerblau (which literally translates to “Berlin blue”), in the heart of the city.

“We wouldn’t be able to do what we do without our design studio in Berlin,” says Uwe Ahrendt, CEO of Nomos Glashütte. “With our manufacture in Glashütte, we have the serious watchmaking part, the tradition — you wouldn’t be able to achieve such quality in Berlin, and it’s the same thing the other way around. You can’t do this type of design in Glashütte. Glashütte is good for quality

of watchmaking and for historical prestige, but not for design inspiration,” he continues. He points to the Nomos catalogs and to the curved glass water bottles in front of us with white Glashütte labels on them that proclaim ‘This water will make you smarter!’ He grabs the bottle: “We wouldn’t get these types of catalogs, or ads, or even these water bottles if it weren’t for Berlin.” And that’s what Berlinerblau takes care of. Virtually everything you see from the brand — advertisements to press releases to website design and content to videos of their manufacture to the watches themselves — all of it starts in that design studio.

Back in Berlin, there’s an interesting mix of old and new. It’s obvious in its East Side Gallery — a stretch of Berlin that has the longest portion of what’s left of the Berlin Wall — which is now covered in paintings, graffiti, love locks and poems. But it’s also evident at Berlinerblau. The pre-War building sits next to a cozy Thai restaurant in front of the Landwehr canal, a white brick building with a red brick entrance and wrought iron balusters that follow along the stairs inside.

Walking up the stairs to the design headquarters, the wooden floors creak beneath my feet. The building has clearly been repainted and redecorated, but it’s still evident that it’s a pre-War structure — like most of Berlin, it feels like it has seen history unfold. And once inside

the actual design offices, you instantly understand that it’s a Nomos building.

Tall windows fill the offices with daylight, Apple desktops whirl with contemplative designers working away, some sitting on ergonomic balls. A blue neon sign hangs high on the first wall you see when entering the offices, proclaiming “Ahoi Glashütte!”

“That’s from our Baselworld booth when we first introduced the Ahoi model in 2013, and we decided to keep it for the office. The name ‘Ahoi,’ it’s very Nomos,” said Patricia Hellmuth, Head of International Press for Nomos Glashütte.

The walls are lined with mood boards — literally, one wall is just covered in dials with different color variants, soothing my inner perfectionist — tacked with images the designers draw inspiration from, including one with the brand’s latest line, the “At Work” series.

“We wanted to appeal more to men with this series; men who are career oriented, so we went with a bigger case size, and then with the dial we wanted something more ‘machine’ oriented, so we took inspiration from the *silberpfeil* car,” explains Höhnel. He points to the dial of the watch, whose silver dial looks like a streak, as if a car *whooshed* past you. “We were looking at galvanized dials and brushed dials, which are typically brushed vertically, and we decided to just turn it horizontal to be more cool and dynamic,” he continues. “So the silvercut looks like it goes ‘Zeung!’”



The Tetra Neomatik 39 silvercut from the brand's "At Work" series



As I sit in a beautifully lit conference room, staring at a black wall (the only black wall in the design studio) with the numerous design awards Nomos has won marked on it, it starts to become clear that this isn't a standard manufacture visit. Nomos works differently from other brands — at 27, the brand is relatively young compared to its competition, but it's clearly basking in its youth and fresh ideas.

“Like Berlin, we had to liberate ourselves from the barriers of the past,” says Höhnel. “Sometimes what’s challenging about design is how close you get to it, and we focus too much on what’s been done instead of what can be done. But with Nomos, we have the freedom to design for ourselves — we keep things clean and functional, and we get to explore and have Berlin as background noise.”

With a clear brand identity rooted in Berlin’s creative side, a dose of quirk, and a manufacturing powerhouse in Glashütte, Nomos is thriving.

“The Swiss watchmaking industry faced a loss in the last few years, up to 12%, but for Nomos, this wasn’t the case. We’ve had a growth in 2016 of 24%, and the year before 31%,” explains Ahrendt.



This page:
The “Ahoi Glashütte!” sign in their design offices; numerous awards won by Nomos.

“There are a few reasons why it has worked out this way for us,” he continues. “One of those reasons is that we stick to our core values, to what Nomos really is — the simplicity in design, not too many novelties. And on the other hand, we have become technologically independent with the Nomos swing system; there are only a handful

of watch companies out there who can produce this essential watch component and who are independent because of this. And then, what is very important too is that we have our Berlin studio on one side, with the design and communications, and Glashütte on the other side providing the watchmaking. Combining the two, we get the best of both worlds.”

THE QUIET POWER OF GLASHÜTTE

The best of both worlds is certainly an apt way of putting it. Located in Saxony, Glashütte is a small and quiet town, surrounded by towering mountains green with pine trees. And though she is small, mighty is her watchmaking power — out of approximately 1,600 residents, over 1,000 of them are proficient watchmakers. While it doesn't have the vibrant sleepless lifestyle of Berlin, it certainly boasts a quiet power that makes Nomos a contender in traditional watchmaking.

A huge part of that watchmaking power that makes Nomos the independent brand that it is today is its development of the Nomos swing system and the DUW 3001 movement. Theodor Prenzel, Deputy Head of Research & Development for Nomos, headed the project back in 2012 and was given a real challenge. "I only had three goals to meet in developing a new movement: make it flat, make it accurate, and make it cost effective," he details. "Typically, the rule in watchmaking was that a movement should either be flat, accurate or affordable. It took us seven years in R&D and almost \$12 million in research and development to complete the Nomos swing system alone."

In his office overlooking the sleepy town of Glashütte, Prenzel explains the development behind

the DUW 3001 thoughtfully and meticulously: "There are multiple levels in a watch movement, so they're built upwards — and because of the limited amount of space, there's a limited amount of parts per level. So we wanted to change that, and we took a lot of time to understand why each part is there, and to understand the movement fully before adjusting it. We were able to fit almost the same number of parts between the base plate and the three-quarter plate in a 1mm space. In total, the movement is 3.2mm in height; it's extremely thin for a self-winding movement."

When I asked Prenzel if he felt he could have achieved this with any other company, he looks at the movement in front of him and responds emphatically, "I don't think so." He continues, "Trial and error is not the Nomos way — they gave me end goals, and then stepped back and gave me the freedom and resources to understand these movements and to figure out how to do it our way. It wasn't important for them to have complications for the sake of complications, it was important to understand every detail of the movement and to do it right."

Back in their watchmaking workshops, Prenzel and one of the Nomos watchmakers demonstrate how they put the movement together,



This page:
Assembly of the DUW 3001 movement
in the Nomos manufacture.



including the most crucial part: inserting the escape assembly (the Nomos swing system) with its tempered blue Nomos balance spring, a minuscule blue coil set atop a gold balance wheel. Once "clicked-in," the recognizable "tick-tock" of the movement — a quiet and stunning symbiosis — starts. The whole process is careful, measured and extremely efficient.

Made in collaboration with the Technical University of Dresden, that tiny blue coil (and its surrounding parts, of course) allowed Nomos to become technologically independent. Instead of relying on other movement suppliers, the Nomos swing system and the DUW 3001 movement opened up the market for the brand: "Being independent gives us huge freedom in making decisions — there's no big group or concerns which are making the decisions or defining the bottom line for us. It differentiates us from our neighbors. We can really decide what kind of watches we produce, what we communicate to people or to the press, or even which political standpoint we take or don't take on certain issues," explains Ahrendt.

**OPPOSITES ATTRACT:
GLASHÜTTE & BERLIN**

Back in Glashütte, Nomos' Katharina Ehrmann, my Berlin/Glashütte guide, brings me to their new (at the time of my visit, it had only been open two weeks) production and fine finishing department in Schlottwitz, a district of Glashütte. The building itself doesn't match the architecture of the rest of the town — like what Hellmuth said earlier about the Ahoi, it's very Nomos.

The rectangular building looks to be made of small wooden planks, with big windows to look into their brand new (and fully stocked) kitchen. Inside,



Clockwise from left:
The Metro Neomatik 39 silvercut; Tetra Neomatik 39 silvercut; Tangente Neomatik 39 silvercut; production and fine finishing department in Schlottwitz.

it looks like a watch manufacture, with engineers focusing intently on small parts and big machines. The walls are white and new, with a dose of Nomos design on the window frames, which are painted a bright orange (matching the orange accents in the brand's Metro line). The intent efficiency of the work going on in this building, combined with the Nomos design influences of Berlin, is a great symbol of the successful marriage Nomos has been able to foster between Glashütte and Berlin.

And the man who brought these two places together in holy matrimony? That's Roland Schwertner, the founder of Nomos Glashütte. Outside the building in Schlottwitz, we run into Ahrendt coming out of his stunning vintage powder blue Mercedes-Benz. Ahrendt tells me, "I actually bought this from our founder, Roland, and it's probably the most comfortable car I've ever driven!"

Immediately, I ask if it's possible

to take a portrait of him with the car. Ahrendt agrees happily, moving the car for me so we can have the Nomos headquarters in the background. With lightness in his step and humor in his voice, Ahrendt tells me about his position as CEO: "I've been having fun for the last 17 years! And the reason why is quite simple: it's a beautiful product made by a team that brings me a lot of joy, not only here in Glashütte, but in Berlin as well. We have fun working together."

Driving back into the Berlin traffic that would make any regular commuter crazy, there are people on bicycles that whizz past cars into narrow streets. And, weirdly enough, I don't think about collision this time, or how Berlin seems to be full of it. Instead, it's all about harmony, clean lines, and a healthy dose of quirk and humor — in other words, the Nomos flair. ★