



## Changing Faces

Breitling's new head of design, Guy Bove,  
moves tradition forward

Story by Jan Tegler · Photography by Rick Wenner · For Rhapsody, May 2018

**S**everal hundred guests are watching as Guy Bove and Georges Kern step out under a white-hot spotlight at an event dubbed “The Legendary Future.” It’s a late February evening at the cavernous Duggal Greenhouse in Brooklyn, and these two men are about to unveil a brand-new line of watches, one that’s set to change the face of the 134-year-old Swiss company Breitling.

The watches that Bove and Kern—Breitling’s head of design and CEO, respectively—are showing off tonight are Navitimers, the latest in a line that is fundamental to the company’s DNA. First introduced in the early 1950s, the Navitimer (a portmanteau of “navigation” and “timer”) is perhaps the most famous pilot’s watch ever, and the Breitling brand has, not coincidentally, long been associated with aviation. So it comes as little surprise that when Bove presents his Navitimer 8 line, which eschews the circular slide rule surrounding the dial that is the model’s signature design cue, horology enthusiasts respond with a mix of excitement and consternation. The designer has caused a stir—exactly as he intended.



Breitling CEO Georges Kern (center) with astronaut and Breitling ambassadors Scott Kelly (left) and Mark Kelly (right) at the Brooklyn Legendary Future event

An ArtCenter College of Design graduate, Bove arrived at Breitling having previously amassed nearly 20 years of experience designing wristwatches and other products for IWC Schaffhausen and Chopard. He began his career with M Design in Lausanne, an agency that handled a wide range of projects, including some for the watch industry. Kern, then working at the Richemont Group, a Swiss luxury goods company, was a client. When Kern became CEO of IWC in 2002, he hired Bove to set up an in-house design team.

“IWC was small when we started—less than a quarter of the size it is now,” recalls Bove, who followed Kern to Breitling after the latter took over as CEO last summer. “There were some really die-hard people who loved IWC. That enthusiasm is a little bit the same as Breitling.”

Over the years, Breitling has garnered numerous celebrity followers. The interior of the event at the Duggal Greenhouse is decorated with photos of everyone from trumpeter Miles Davis and Formula 1 driver Graham Hill to test pilot/astronaut Scott Carpenter wearing the watches—showing how far the brand has moved beyond its aviation roots. (Brad Pitt, Justin Timberlake, and David Beckham have also sported the wristwear.) Bove has been tasked with broadening Breitling’s appeal via five new Navitimer 8 models—two chronographs, two three-hand automatics, and a world timer. (In a telling move, Bove and Kern held unveilings in Shanghai and Zurich prior to New York.) But, of course, to move forward, it’s always good to look to the past.



The Navitimer 8 Chronograph Blacksteel with a black dial and black leather strap

“He said ‘cockpit clock,’” Bove explains of Kern’s initial directions. “So I looked at what Huit did.”

Bove is referring to Breitling’s Huit Aviation department, which launched in 1938 to design cockpit instruments, including clocks, for aircraft. Named for the eight-day power reserve the mechanical clocks offered (*huit* is “eight” in French), the highly legible instruments provided the inspiration for Bove’s

decidedly less technical-looking Navitimer 8, a line designed to attract new customers.



The Navitimer 8 Unitime with a silver dial and stainless steel bracelet

“My goal isn’t that people can attach my design directly to the past,” Bove explains. “Breitling is a framework, and you can bend the framework. The question is, how far can you bend it?”

It’s a question that Bove—who doesn’t wear a watch because “there’s a good chance that I’d be designing toward it or in reaction to it”—asks with little trepidation. He’s undaunted by the challenge of designing new timepieces under an iconic name, observing that the framework of Breitling “has already been bent” over time. He also stresses that he’s part of a

team that’s taking Breitling into the future. “What I really like about what I do is not designing products,” he says. “It’s design strategy that I like: Where are we going with the company, and how do we get there?”

Moving forward, Breitling’s models will hew to three themes—air, land, and sea—which may be sporty, elegant, or contemporary in varying degrees. The Navitimer 8 represents a more elegant Navitimer, Bove says, noting that although he is making changes, the new watches aren’t replacing the traditional Navitimer 1 chronographs so prized by Breitling enthusiasts and collectors.

“If we think of how the original Navitimer is regarded today, I want people to look back at my designs and see them as a meaningful part of Breitling’s



history,” Bove says. “The idea is not that we made a great watch in 1954 and then made it again in 2018; it’s that in 2018 you can see a connection to the past, but you can see Breitling in these years.”



The Navitimer 8 Automatic with a black dial and black leather strap

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