

INTERIOR DESIGN[®]

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fashion
not just
window dressing

time for a change

The attitude adjustment at TAG Heuer's Swiss headquarters was engineered by Carbondale

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Everything in the vast black room seems to whirl, spin, or flicker with light. An immense, conical projection surface hovers in the middle of the ceiling like a UFO, its swirling video images reflected by the glistening floor. On the walls, LCD screens add to the sense of constant motion. Around the room, glowing pools of white light float above auras of bright blue. "You're pulled into a vortex of movement," architect Eric Carlson says. "It's like being inside a watch."

The gallery, a one-room TAG Heuer museum at headquarters in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, showcases a collection of historical timepieces, presented as a "communication device," Carlson says, to reinforce an image of cutting-edge precision. Created in 1985—when the high-tech manufacturer TAG bought venerable watchmaker Heuer, established in 1860—the company now belongs to luxury conglomerate LVMH. (Carlson headed Louis Vuitton's architecture department in Paris before founding his own firm, Carbondale, named after his hometown in Illinois.)

While the gallery's contents focus on the history of TAG Heuer, especially its association with auto racing, Carlson's interior is meant to propel the brand resolutely into the

The main attraction at headquarters in La Chaux-de-Fonds is a gallery that celebrates company history. Dominating the board-formed concrete ceiling, a conical screen 25 feet in diameter shows moving video images from 12 rear projectors.

Top: A counter of polished Corian curves around display cases equipped with magnifying glasses for viewing the watches. **Bottom, from left:** On all four walls, a brushed-aluminum band frames backlit text and photography and glass-fronted vitrines. One vitrine contains a 1920 stopwatch.



future. This involved figuring out not only "how to avoid doing what everyone else does," he says, but also "how to build a big space to show small things." The gallery became a 2,200-square-foot metaphor for three different parts of a watch.

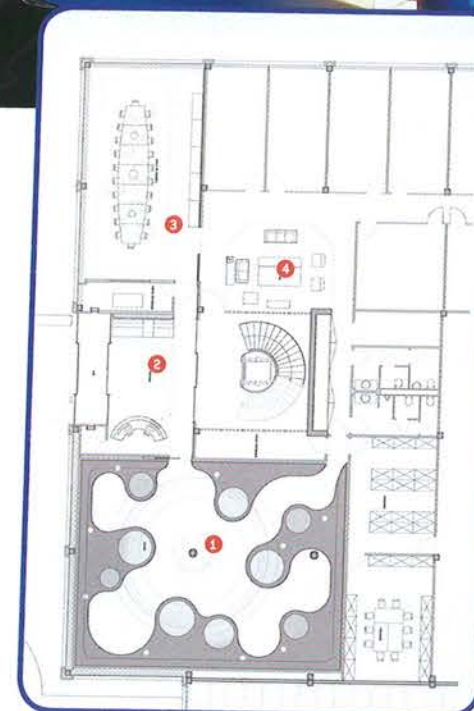
The crystal is represented by the conical projection screen that caps the room. Thanks to a battery of rear projectors, the screen is alive with panoramic images in constant motion. As Formula One cars zoom around the screen's 123-foot perimeter, for instance, their dizzying reflection plays out on the floor's black

ceramic tile. The sounds of the race, produced by an ultrasonic system, can be heard only directly beneath the integral speakers.

Like the bezel of a watch, a band of brushed aluminum runs all the way around the walls at eye level. This band frames a time line that documents TAG Heuer history—read clockwise, of course. Each telling a different part of the story, the LCD screens alternate with backlit text and photos and glass-fronted vitrines. The vitrines open hydraulically, so items from the company's collection of 300 antique and vintage

timepieces can be changed. One day, a vitrine might contain the Mikrograph, an antique mechanical stopwatch; the next, you might find the 1969 Monaco, worn by Steve McQueen in the film *Le Mans*.

Representing watch faces are nine cylindrical cases. They're topped by rounds of museum-quality clear glass, just about the only non-reflective material in the room. Beneath the glass, displays are arranged on a surface of steel scored in op-art circles, which seem to vibrate on their own, and illuminated by rings of LEDs and halogens. Extra-large rimless





Left: In reception, custom panels by Ottavio Di Blasi Associati are installed behind custom seating composed of leather-covered cushions and a rosewood platform.

Right: The conference room's custom rosewood-topped table is surrounded by Mario Bellini chairs.

Opposite bottom: A stainless-steel door slides back to open the conference room to the lounge. At the threshold, ceramic tile changes to oil-finished beech.



magnifying lenses, left out on each case, invite closer examination.

All nine cases are built into a highly polished black Corian counter carved into free-form curves that flow in and out from the walls of the room. Because the counter is lit from below by blue neon tubes, each case appears to float on an eerie nimbus. The effect is otherworldly, mysterious, futuristic, and decidedly glamorous.

Outside the gallery, the atmosphere shifts dramatically. The rest of the building, an existing industrial structure, now handles corporate functions. Carlson was asked to design the small reception area, adjacent to the gallery, as well as

a conference room and a lounge.

The lounge, set on a platform, is furnished with a gray rug and two very different types of seating. Slim and red, the Superlight 530 chairs are by BarberOsgerby. Chunky and black, the LC3 sofa is by Le Corbusier, La Chaux-de-Fonds's most famous native son.

Clearly visible from the lounge is a spaceship-worthy stainless-steel pocket door, which slides back to reveal the conference room. It's dominated by an elliptical table topped in polished rosewood, a humanizing contrast to the black leather on the surrounding armchairs by Mario Bellini.

Ring shapes, cut out of the plaster dropped ceiling to house recessed lighting, also provide a counterpoint to the grid pattern established by the shiny black ceramic floor tiles that emerge around the edges of a pale gray wool rug. Along one wall runs a long rosewood credenza with a glass top used to display watches currently in production. Above, Carlson installed screens that show TAG Heuer advertising blowups—starring Uma Thurman, Brad Pitt, and friends.

PROJECT TEAM

PIERRE TORTRAT; PIERRE MARESCAUX; PAULINE CALLAIS; GÉRALDINE ECAULT; JESSICA MARQUES; CÉLINE HELFER; CARBONDALE. GEORGE SEXTON ASSOCIATES: LIGHTING CONSULTANT. DUCKS SCÉNO: EXHIBITION CONSULTANT. ADF: MILLWORK. IMMOROC: GENERAL CONTRACTOR.

PRODUCT SOURCES

FROM FRONT GERRIETS: CUSTOM PROJECTION SCREEN (GALLERY). DUPONT: COUNTER MATERIAL. BODINO: CUSTOM PANELS (RECEPTION). MODAR: CUSTOM SEATING (RECEPTION), CUSTOM CABINET (CONFERENCE ROOM). MACÉ: CUSTOM TABLE (CONFERENCE ROOM). CASSINA: CHAIRS (CONFERENCE ROOM), SOFA (LOUNGE). ERCO: RECESSED CEILING FIXTURES (CONFERENCE ROOM, LOUNGE). TISCA: CUSTOM RUGS. CAPPELLINI: CHAIRS (LOUNGE).

