

# The Indie Insider: The Bespoke World Of Sartory Billard



- By Logan Baker

*Phillips in Association with Bacs & Russo is thrilled to welcome you to The Geneva Sessions, Fall 2023, online auction, running from 12:00 PM CET, Friday, September 8, to 2:00 PM CET, Friday, September 15. Featuring more than 60 different high-end luxury wristwatches, the sale covers everything from A. Lange & Söhne and F.P. Journe to Audemars Piguet and Patek Philippe. It even includes a possibly unique 2022 Sartory Billard SB05 that's featured in this story.*

Sartory Billard only recently appeared in the world of PHILLIPS.



Sartory Billard SB05 Unique Piece, sold during Geneva Watch Auction: XVI for CHF 13,860

A second Sartory Billard watch was included in our [Hong Kong Sessions, Spring 2023](#) online auction, a third in the [Geneva Watch Auction: XVII](#), and a fourth in our ongoing [Geneva Sessions, Fall 2023](#) online auction, so I figured it was about time we dug a bit deeper to see what the brand is all about.

## The Beginning

Sartory Billard was founded as a personal project by industrial designer Armand Billard and his colleague and friend Ludovic Sartory in 2015. The two men had full-time jobs at the time – Billard was the owner of a design agency – so at first, they only wanted to experiment with designing a watch for themselves or to share among other close friends.

That changed a few years down the road, after Billard sold his company to a larger agency and eventually left it all together, in order to focus entirely on his nascent watch business.



Armand Billard, 48

“I was an industrial designer for more than 15 years,” Billard says. “I worked on electronic appliances, computers, phones, baby products, printers, you name it. I eventually discovered that a watch could be a very good expression of design and creativity in just a few square centimeters. The first watch that triggered this and that started my passion was a Cartier Santos 100 that I bought in 2004.”

After a few years of tinkering with unsuccessful designs, Ludovic Sartory eventually lost interest in working in the watch business, so Billard ended up purchasing his shares but keeping the company’s original name intact. Now working full time in watches from his home in Moselle, France, near the German border, Billard began developing what would eventually be the company’s breakout release, the SB04.

## Breakthrough

Sartory Billard’s first three watches – the SB01, SB02, and SB03 – all utilized unconventional case shapes that demonstrated Billard’s industrial design background. Those case designs ended up having a limited appeal with collectors, so Billard switched up his strategy for his fourth watch, the SB04, instead focusing all his energy on the dials while utilizing a more conventional 40mm round case profile.

Billard decided his best path forward would be to allow his clients to personalize each and every watch he created, utilizing a large variety of dial treatments and materials that he would create almost entirely by himself at his workshop. Billard, who had no experience in technical watchmaking, finishing, or dialmaking when

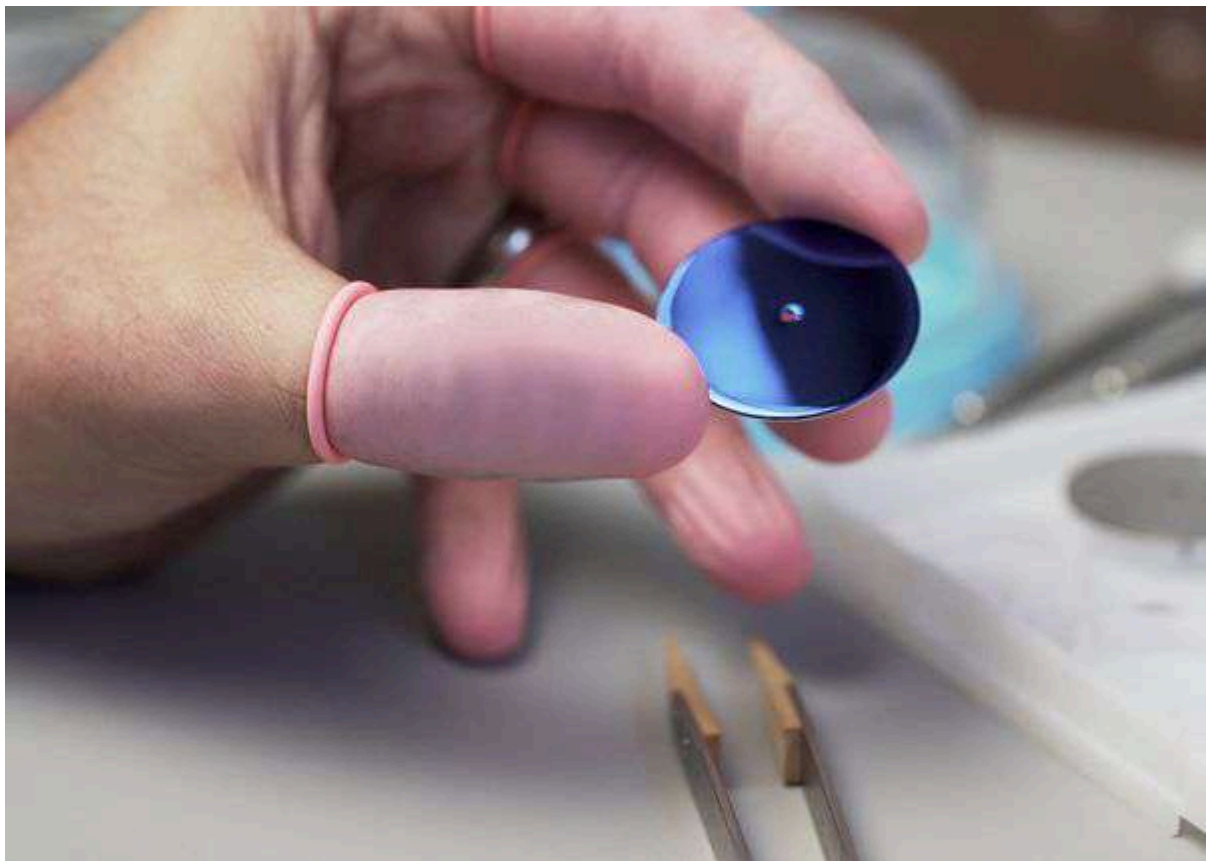


Sartory Billard SB04 Unique Piece, in steel with heat-blued titanium dial; Estimate: HKD \$24,000 - 48,000

All examples of the SB04 feature the same overall case shape (40mm × 11.5mm), in steel or titanium, that was designed by Billard to be simple in construction but complex in appearance, with a mixture of brushed and polished finishes and short lugs that give the appearance of being soldered on but are actually attached to the caseback. The standard SB04 case is milled using CNC machines and sourced from a Swiss supplier, while dials, chapter rings, and other customizable components are produced by Billard himself using laser cutters and traditional machinery, including a Schaublin lathe, a favorite of independent watchmakers throughout Switzerland and beyond.

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including blue, burgundy, and honey gold. Billard has developed his own technique for heat-treating titanium that utilizes a small oven that heats the entire dial at once rather than the traditional methodology of heating the metal over an open flame. There are five different dial finish options to choose from, or you can opt for a hard-stone dial at an extra cost. Sartory Billard also offers *guilloché* patterns as an alternative that are handled by Comblémine, Kari Voutilainen's dial factory.



Creating a custom dial. Image courtesy of Sartory Billard.

Customers can also select or specify any font or design for the hour markers on the metal chapter ring, which Billard shapes himself using a laser cutter. If requested by the customer, the hands and chapter ring are then polished by hand and filled with lume. The laser cutter can also be used to personalize the caseback of any watch based on the client's wishes.

Inside every SB04 is the self-winding La Joux-Perret G100 caliber, which Billard upgrades with the option of a fluted titanium ring in the customer's choice of seven different heat-treated colors.



The La Joux-Perret G100 caliber inside the Sartory Billard SB04; Estimate: HKD \$24,000 - 48,000

There's a long history of customization in high-end watchmaking, but it's typically only available to the wealthiest collectors. The SB04 changed that in a big way. With a base cost of 3,000 euros, Sartory Billard effectively democratized the personalization process.

"If you are making a phone or a computer, you're making one product that goes to every continent and has to be successful," Billard says, on why his customization-based approach is so important to him. "But when you travel, you realize that people have very different cultures, and very different appreciations of colors, textures, shapes, and materials. Those differences ring a very strong bell within me as a designer."



Billard works with each client on the design and execution of their watch. Image courtesy of Sartory Billard.

By working with each customer on an individual basis, Billard forms a unique relationship with them that often involves talking multiple times per week to provide updates, if not every day. It's a massive amount of work, given Billard is still Sartory Billard's only official employee, which is why he was somewhat surprised when a few of his existing clients came to him asking for something different.

## Moving Upmarket

A small group of collectors and previous Sartory Billard clients asked Billard if it would be possible to create an upgraded version of the SB04, with a higher-quality movement, a smaller case, and other noticeable improvements. The SB05 was then born in 2022 from that initial request.

Clients can choose from steel, titanium, gold, or tantalum cases that measure 38.5 mm × 8.5mm, while the dial format and design/material configuration has a nearly unlimited amount of possibilities. The movement inside is another La Joux-Perret movement, the manual-wind caliber 7380 with a 90-hour power reserve.



Sartory Billard SB05 Unique Piece, sold during Geneva Watch Auction: XVI for CHF 13,860

Billard worked closely with Comblémine and Cattin, the casemaker owned by Voutilainen, on the execution of the SB05. Cattin designed a new, more complex case for the SB05, which incorporates 20 parts compared to the seven on the SB04, and Comblémine assembles each watch after receiving finished movements from La Joux-Perret.

Every SB05 is 100-percent made to order after a design process between Billard and the client that involves a back-and-forth discussion with multiple renderings before final approval is given. A specific price is then calculated based on labor and materials, with a 50-percent deposit due at the beginning of the project. A steel SB05, for reference, will typically start around 9,500 euros.





The manual-wind La Joux-Perret caliber 7381 inside the Sartory Billard SB05.

## What's Next

Business has been consistent for Billard since the launch of the SB04. He produced 100 examples of the SB04 and between 50 and 60 examples of the SB05 in 2022. He expects those numbers to grow this year.

Sartory Billard also recently announced the SB07, its first sport watch featuring an integrated stainless steel bracelet and two production options: the Signature Edition, which has a mostly consistent design with only the dial color available for customization and starts at 6,840 euros, and the Bespoke Edition, which can be personalized via dial color, *guilloché* pattern, or through the use of a hardstone dial, starting at 7,690 euros.



The recently announced Sartory Billard SB07 sport watch, with a unique aventurine dial. Image by Logan Baker.

Billard has mapped out what the next few years of his business will look like, and he confirmed to me that he does plan to open a dedicated Sartory Billard workshop somewhere in Switzerland in the near future. He's also working on establishing a small international distribution network, with likely one representative each in North America, Europe, and Asia.

His clients will then have someone locally to help guide them through the customization process, while Billard focuses his energy entirely what he cares about the most: the watches.

*You can learn more, place a bid, and view the entire Geneva Sessions, Fall 2023, [catalog here](#).*

*You can learn more about Sartory Billard on the company's [website](#).*

### **About Phillips In Association With Bacs & Russo**

The team of specialists at PHILLIPS Watches is dedicated to an uncompromised approach to quality, transparency, and client service. Phillips in Association with Bacs & Russo holds the world record for the most successful watch auction, with its Geneva Watch Auction: XIV having realized \$74.5 million in 2021. Over the course of 2021 and 2022, the company sold 100% of the watches offered, a first in the industry, resulting in the highest annual total in history across all the auction houses at \$227 million.

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He joined Phillips in Association with Bacs & Russo at the start of 2023 as the department's Senior Editorial Manager. He splits his time between New York and Geneva.

### Recommended Reading

[Independent Watchmakers: The Bridge Between Vintage And Modern Collectibles Under The Radar Independent Watchmakers That Won't Stay Under The Radar For Long.](#)

[The Bespoke Dials Of Kari Voutilainen](#)

Phillips Watches Online  
Auction: The Geneva Sessions  
Fall 2023

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