

# Unique Complications

An Interview with Rolando Braga,  
General Manager, Armand Nicolet



**EDITORS' NOTE** Rolando Braga is an Italian entrepreneur who has been active in the field of horology for 35 years and who has been recognized for important achievements in the design and engineering of wristwatches.

**COMPANY BRIEF** Each of Armand Nicolet's ([www.armandnicolet.com](http://www.armandnicolet.com)) eight collections are composed of a series of unique complications that have been designed by engineers and created by master watchmakers inside their Tramelan, Switzerland-based atelier. Gold and steel, MOP dials, and diamonds are coupled with an array of steel bracelets, calf, crocodile, or rubber straps, providing various options for the watch-wearer with different needs.



Rolando Braga

## Would you give a brief overview of the history of the Armand Nicolet brand and where it stands today?

Armand Nicolet has a long history; it was in business for more than a century as a factory operating in the finishing of complicated mechanical movements for other famous Swiss brands.

Before I joined the company, around 20 years ago, the marketing and promotion of our Armand Nicolet brand was not a priority for the company, but when I discovered the capability and the knowledge our company had, letting the world know and enjoying what we are able to do became my goal.

We are a very specialized and organized company. We use the best mix of the ultimate technology for the production of parts and the extraordinary human capability of transforming and finishing the movements that our master watchmakers have. The positioning and image of our brand is consistent today with this reality.

In comparison to the big groups of the luxury watch industry, we are a small company but we proudly bear strong points that make us unique.

We are the only brand in the world that offers Limited Edition watches that feature original vintage mechanical movements from 50 or 60 years ago that have been tuned nowadays to reach the highest performing level of the best Swiss mechanical watch production.

This is made possible by our knowledge and experience in working the mechanical movements and also by the fact that we have still available in our stock lots of these original

movements that we now use only for our Limited Edition series.

It would be impossible or crazy expensive to produce these same movements today without having access to these original old movements, and the specific tools and machines that we still have in our factory. It is impossible to reproduce the allure, uniqueness, and soul that these original old movements have.

## In terms of the range of collections that you offer, how do you define the target market?

We have two kinds of collections:

The manufacture collection, which is made up only of unique pieces – the Limited Edition series – as they feature the original vintage movements; then we have the contemporary collection, which uses ETA movements, tuned and modified by us.

Both of them are designed in Italy, where our marketing and design office is located; the style that comes from our Italian designers adds a little special beauty to our models while respecting our tradition.

The Limited Edition series is a product that targets mainly collectors and watch lovers interested in a product that is also an investment. We have collectors who cannot find the product close to the city where they live so they come to our factory to purchase it and take a tour to see how the watch is made for their pure pleasure.

The contemporary collection is conceived to offer a larger audience a product that has an unbeatable price/quality ratio; our range of price point goes from \$2,500 to \$7,700 for the stainless steel models. This is made possible by our strategy, as we are a company that doesn't invest billions in advertising but invests mainly in the product itself. We offer a great product at a very reasonable price point.

## Geographically, your focus is Europe, but where do you see the U.S., and can you talk about some of the emerging markets?

We are a small company but our market is the world, not just Europe, and we don't have any market that accounts for more than 10 percent, maybe less, of our total turnover. We sell in Europe, especially in Germany and Italy; in Southeast Asia, particularly in Malaysia where we have a monobrand boutique in the Starhill Mall in Singapore; in Japan; Thailand; Vietnam; China; Russia; some countries in Central Asia; and in North and South America. We don't have a single market with a strong distributor that is our main

market. We are also still making deals to distribute in some emerging markets we are not in yet.

## How much of an impact has technology had on the way you're producing and designing product, and has it taken away any of the craftsmanship?

What makes the difference between a nice Swiss watch that will last for generations and other watches? It's the finishing of the movement, the choice of the best materials for each part, the best finishing and oiling of these parts, and the very skilled assembling and testing. It is not only the most advanced machines or technology but it is about being able to utilize the best technology, as well as to train skilled people, teaching them the craftsmanship capability of the best old watchmakers.

## Were you attracted to and interested in watches early on?

My first watch was a gift from my grandfather. I was eight years old, and I remember how emotional and special it was but, at that time, I couldn't imagine that watches would become so important in my life. I have also always been involved in mechanics, working as a kid on my bicycle and then my motorbike.

When I got the chance to enter the watch business, I was 20 and I started as a sale rep. At around 27, I developed my own assembling factory in Italy where we assembled watches for other private label brands. The factory was quite successful and business was growing well.

I met Willy Nicolet by chance in 1987 and he introduced me to the hidden secrets of the Swiss watch industry, and I fell in love with the idea of recovering these extraordinary mechanical movements that were still in the Armand Nicolet factory, so I decided to close my company in Italy and move to Switzerland.

At first, Nicolet SA (the factory) focused on the private label production for other brands. When the production was well organized, we started to bring the Armand Nicolet brand back to life.

Our skilful Italian designers started collaborating with the very best mechanical ability and technology of our Swiss people in the historical factory in Tramelan, Switzerland. This collaboration brought about the creation of the Armand Nicolet collection that hit the market during the Basel Fair in 2000. ●

Armand Nicolet watches from the SO5 collection (left); the TL7 collection (center); and the LS8 collection (right)