

Watch pays homage to Aspen Mountain

By Troy Hooper

Aspen Daily News Staff Writer

There may be a recession in this country but a Netherlands entrepreneur thinks the time is right to roll out a luxury watch in tribute to Aspen Mountain that will retail for \$38,900.

The Aspen One collection, which goes on sale Feb. 19, is limited to 3,267 pieces — the same number of vertical feet on Aspen Mountain — and it lets you know at 4 p.m. to switch the watch's ski strap to its après-ski strap. The Swiss-made time pieces are offered in four color combinations of 18 karat white or rose gold and it includes a specially designed compass that "shows you where you are when you are on Aspen Mountain." The names of the watch buyers will be inscribed on plaques that will be featured on three cut boulders already located on private land on the back side of Aspen Mountain.

Netherlands native René van Ass founded Swiss-based Aspen Jewelry and Watches to introduce the Aspen One collection. As if his new watches aren't already eye-catching enough, he's also not skimping on a three-day launch party he's planned here next month. He is fly-

ing out an international press corps that includes Forbes Style, GQ Germany, the Robb Report, Miljonaire Magazine and other high-end publications and putting them up in Aspen to learn about the watch and the town's history.

"Aspen has a very strong name that elicits a very strong emotion. Many people within the society of Aspen, I would guess, don't know how big this image is and how strong this image is throughout the world," van Ass said.

The allure of Aspen is evident in the story of how the Aspen One collection came about. Before even visiting Aspen, van Ass grew enamored with this little city in the Rockies and its rich history, soaking up its images and information online and in print. With a background in branding, he became convinced the Aspen brand was worth investing in and through New York-based Bradford Licensing LLC, he leased the Aspen name, which he said offers him some international marketing protections. The Aspen One watch collection is just the first in a line of products van Ass said he would like to introduce to the world market. He first came here about two years ago and has visited a total of five times.



Photo by Riccardo Savi

The back of the Aspen One watch with a reflection of Aspen Mountain.

"Aspen is internationally known for its natural beauty, perfect slopes, and the glamorous appeal of its famous visitors," he said. "By marketing this collection, we are marketing Aspen as it is ... and what it was. We will emphasize Aspen's rich history and we want people all over the world to fall in love with Aspen even more."

Meridian Jewelers in Aspen will be the exclusive Colorado retailer of the Aspen One watch and there will be a total of 50 retail locations for the watch worldwide. The first watches will go on sale at Meridian during the three-day launch, which will include journalists from the United Kingdom, Russia, Italy, Germany, France, the Netherlands and the United States. The unveiling of the Aspen One monument on the back side of Aspen Mountain will occur during the press extravaganza, and van Ass stressed that the boulders are natural and are not a blight to the landscape. He said the monument, which is about 100 feet

from the hut near the Powder Tours operations, is subtle — "you won't even notice it when you pass by."

There are already 25 customers who have been put on a reservations list to purchase the watch, van Ass said. Each watch will be inscribed with the owner's name and its production number in the collection. The first watch made will be auctioned off at an event in Europe next fall to benefit child cancer research and the second watch will be given to an unnamed celebrity.

And while some people might find the timing of the collection's release curious, van Ass said he couldn't let the world's economic problems get in his way.

"There is always room for new initiatives. By sitting and shaking, you will not create any more change. If you do nothing, (the economy) will get worse," he said.

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Riccardo Savi/Special to the Aspen Daily News

A photo of the Aspen One monument on Aspen Mountain prior to launch.

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