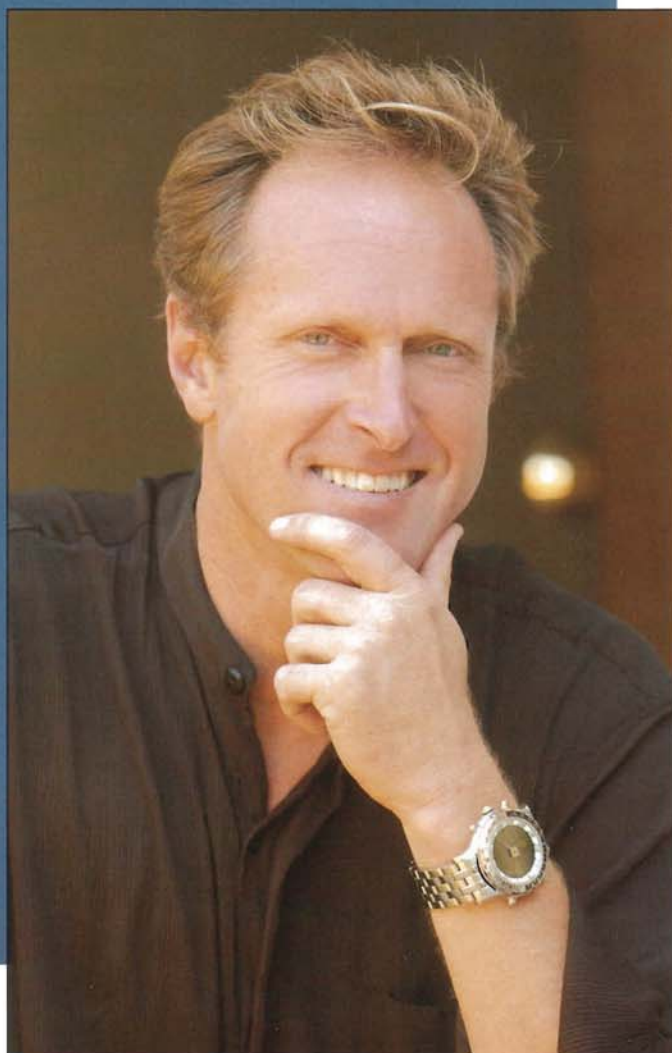


DO WE NEED ANOTHER WRISTWATCH?

YES!



Yes watch company founder Bjorn Kartomten.

AN INTERVIEW WITH BJORN KARTOMTEN

Today, Bjorn Kartomten is the CEO of his own watch company. Fifteen years ago, he was fast-tracking his way up the corporate career ladder, working around the clock in advertising for catalog companies like Sharper Image, Sundance and American Express, when he decided to break from the crowd and rethink his priorities. Out of that experience was born the Yes Celestial Chronograph, a timepiece with a dynamic perspective on the display of time in its most primordial form.

I first came across the Yes wristwatch several months ago, while searching the Internet concerning some obscure time-related topic. There is something unique and special yet also vaguely familiar about the Yes design that got my brain percolating. I usually wear a GMT watch with a bezel that is split in two halves color-coded for day and night. With the 24 on the bezel aligned with the 6 on the dial, the daylight hours seem to occupy the upper half of the dial, and the nighttime hours the lower half.

At best, this only approximates day and night; reality is very different and depends on factors like location and time of year. For example, where I live—in Raleigh, North Carolina—the sun rises today at 7:22 AM and sets at 5:05 PM (EST). That's little

more than nine and a half hours of daylight. However, six months from now, in the middle of summer, sunrise will occur at 5:59 AM, and sunset at 8:34 PM (EDT), as daylight stretches to nearly twelve and a half hours. That's a significant difference.

Enter the Yes Celestial Chronograph. The basic layout is extremely unconventional. For starters, the Celestial Chronograph features a single 24-hour solar hand, the watch dial is actually a liquid crystal display (LCD) that accurately and graphically splits the current day into two components: the lighter portion precisely represents day, and the shaded side, of course, night. The Yes watch also shows the times for sunrise and sunset, and the watch is programmed for 583 cities around the

world. Additional features include moon phase display, digital time readout, stopwatch, alarm with snooze, count-down timer, nightlight and more.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the Yes design is that it provides so much useful information in a relatively straightforward manner. The design is not overly complicated or gimmicky, as many analog/digital wristwatches are. The advantages to having this information (sunrise/sunset, moonrise/moonset, length of day, etc.) will be immediately apparent to pilots, sportsmen, travelers, cyclists, nature photographers, stargazers—anyone who spends working time or leisure time outdoors. Headed to Europe to tour the Bordeaux wine country by motorcycle for a week? This is the wristwatch for you.

The potential applications of the Yes design intrigued me, so I dashed off a few questions to the company by e-mail. Imagine my pleasant surprise to hear back from none other than the founder and head of Yes, Bjorn Kartomten. Over the next several days, we dialogued electronically, and he patiently answered questions about the Celestial Chronograph and plans for future watches.

Against the current backdrop of economic uncertainty and the high stress of carrying multiple workloads in downsized offices or, for too many others, the unique stresses associated with seeking meaningful employment, I suspect that deep down many of us fantasize about leaving it all behind to pursue careers in the world of watches. Bjorn Kartomten successfully navigated this transition.

Kartomten was born and raised in Norway, and he pursued most of his education there. After studying design at the College of Arts and Crafts in Oslo, he furthered his education at arts and crafts schools in Copenhagen, which produced many of the great interior and furniture designers of our time. To this day, Kartomten thinks of himself as an artist—he cheerfully announces that, in a Utopian world, he would be living in Paris, drinking red wine and painting nudes.

Asked how he got his start in watch design and watchmaking, he relates his personal journey, “I came to America from Norway in the 1980s, got a job in advertising and began working my way up the career ladder. I was putting in a lot of hours at the office and well on my way to achieving the American dream, when I began to notice this element of losing

YES, I’LL WEAR IT

I opened the box that came to the *InSync* offices from YES watch, and I was immediately impressed. The YES watch is visually striking and distinctive. I don’t quite understand all its functions yet, so maybe a longer term test is in order. I do know how to read the home and away times and I like the graphic interface that tells me the times for sunrise and sunset, along with the phase of the moon.

The watch is amazingly accurate when it comes to sunrise and sunset. I get up every morning at 4:50 AM, which is before the sun, and one morning I made sure to check the sky when the watch said that the sun was due to rise, and sure enough, there it was. The same was true coming home the other night at sunset—when the watch indicated that sunset was upon us, the sun was indeed setting (not almost setting or having already set, but was actually setting).

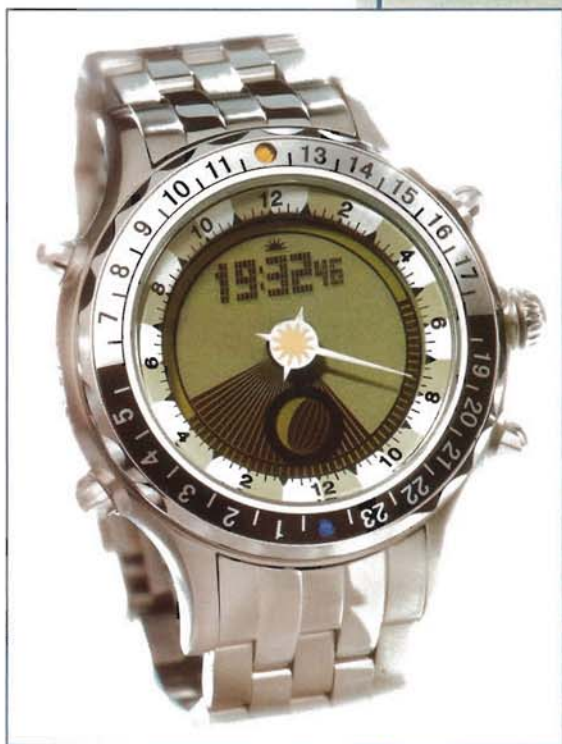
As for the additional functions of the watch, it will be great for traveling because it has a databank of nearly 600 cities, so I’m covered wherever I go throughout the world. The case is thick for a quartz, battery operated watch, but that’s kind of cool. I still have to learn what all

the buttons do—there’s a chronograph, an alarm and more—but so far so good.

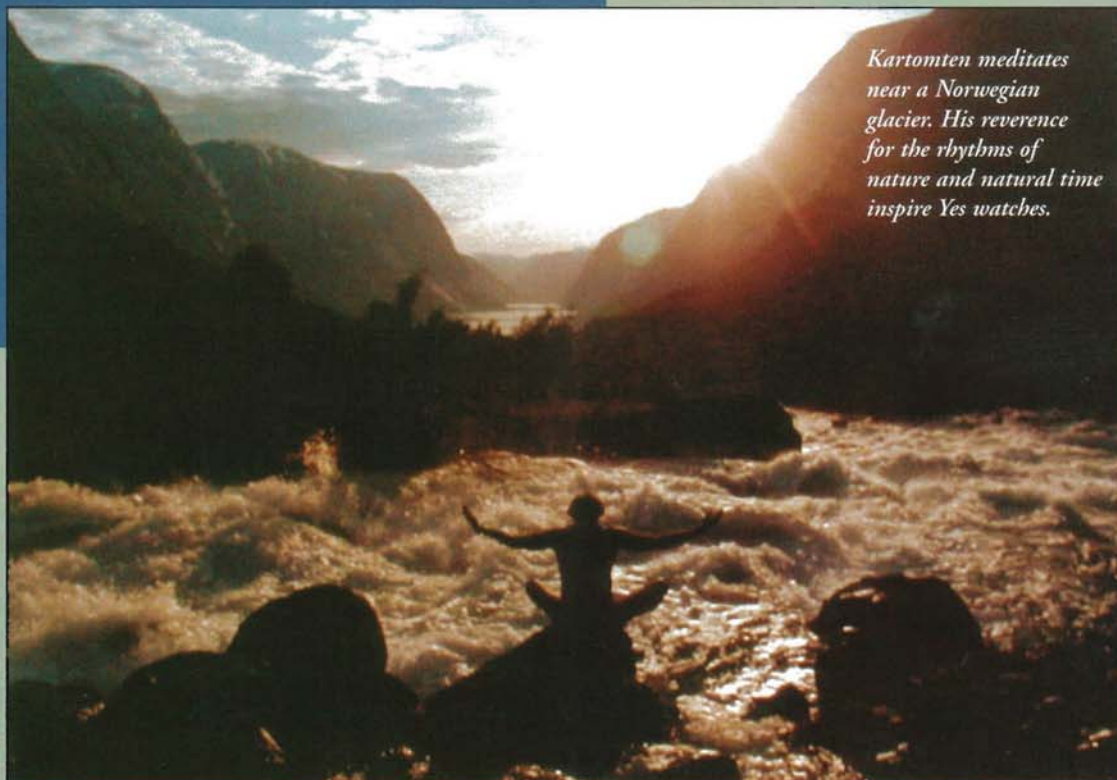
I’m looking forward to taking it on my upcoming trips for *InSync* and watching the sunrises and sunsets in Hawaii, Italy, Taiwan and other locales. I already checked the watch against the sunrises and sunsets listed for various locales on AOL, and the YES watch was right on.

The finish of the watch is quite good—high quality steel, interesting bezel and a good quality, thick rubber strap. I like wearing the watch, and it certainly is a conversation piece. It’s my hope that the YES watch gets me more in tune with earth time instead of man-made time. Wish me luck!

—Keith W. Strandberg



The Yes Zulu wristwatch.



Kartomten meditates near a Norwegian glacier. His reverence for the rhythms of nature and natural time inspire Yes watches.

control of my own sense of time. This realization didn't sit well with my personal concept of how time was supposed to be, so I took a sabbatical for several years during the early 1990s to study how the other half of the world was living. I learned alternative approaches to life from various Indian tantrics and studied with shamans in Machu Picchu. My life was all about exploring alternatives to convention. At the end of that inward-focused time, I came to the inspired, irrevocable conclusion that what the world really needed was another wristwatch!"

We both break into laughter at his punch line but agree, as watch enthusiasts, that what the world really needs *is* another wristwatch. After a moment, I approach the subject of traditional watch design. As much as I might admire new designs, there does not seem to be anything wrong with the conventional wristwatch. Kartomten agrees, to a point. He says, "It's just that most watches only tell part of the time story. The ideal watch would honor not only man-made time, what I refer to as '24:60:60,' but it would also encompass natural time—the natural cycles of the sun and the moon."

I learn that 24:60:60 is an expression Kartomten uses to denote man-made or mechanical time. It is his shorthand for saying "24 hours in a day, 60 minutes in an hour, 60 seconds in a minute," and is synonymous with the expression HH:MM:SS. Kartomten insists that we need mechanical time. "Man-made time

is important and useful, especially when we have planes and trains to catch, right? But if we focus solely on mechanical time, it is likely that we will encounter a 'disconnect,'" he says.

To understand what he means, imagine that it is late autumn and you're out cycling in the countryside in the middle of a long, enjoyable ride when you realize that the sun will be setting soon and your lightweight bicycle is not equipped with lights. Suddenly, you're under pressure to pedal faster and hurry home before dark—that's just one seemingly minor but potentially critical example of a time-related disconnect.

Kartomten does not consider himself a watchmaker in the traditional sense of the word. His role goes beyond that of designer, too; he prefers to think of himself as an agent of change. He explains, "Even though we design, manufacture and bring to market the smartest watches on the planet, I spend a lot of my time broadening people's mindsets about timekeeping to include the natural cycles of the sun and moon. One of the perks of my job is having the opportunity to wear a lot of different hats."

He conceived of the Yes concept for displaying time in 1996 as he was traveling in the Caribbean. He recalls, "I was on one of the great nude beaches in St. Barr's. It was in this idyllic setting that the idea was handed down to me literally in an instant. Then again, this might inform you only of my eternal Norwegian longing for warm, southern beaches." The other main defining

moment came while he was in Switzerland, touring the International Museum of Horology in La Chaux-de-Fonds. He asked the museum's curator about the origins of 24:60:60, and after five minutes of consulting her reference books, she replied that she didn't know. "Wow," he thought, "such a basic question, and she doesn't know the answer." Of course, the correct response would have pointed directly at the ancient Egyptian and Babylonian astronomers, whose observations of the sun and the moon formed the foundation of our concept of time.

Even the company name is unconventional. The name Yes was arrived at while Kartomten was in his garden one particularly beautiful Sunday morning. He relates, "We had been wrestling with the name for quite a while, and every time we came up with a relevant time-related name, our patent lawyer would discover it had already been reserved. Anyway, I was in my garden thinking about our predicament when it occurred to me, perhaps our name should simply represent a feeling, an attitude, and as if by divine affirmation, the word fell out of my mouth, 'Yes.'" Although a few reservations were initially expressed concerning his unique choice—perhaps "Yes" sounded too youthful or overly optimistic—in the final analysis, the essence of his decision was pure, and they proceeded to secure the name.

The newest incarnations of the Yes Celestial Chronograph, the Zulu and the Inca, are 48mm in diameter and 15mm thick—they are quite massive, sized like a small hockey puck. Five years ago, marketing the original design seemed like an endless exercise in rejection. Most people told Kartomten, "It's just too big; we're not interested," and at that point, he began to question himself, wondering, "What have I done?" Fortunately, by today's standards, Yes watches aren't excessively large; in fact, they fit right in with watches such as Panerai. Celebrities, including Arnold Schwarzenegger, Ellen Degeneres and Patricia Cornwell, are often glimpsed wearing oversize watches, reinforcing the trend. Kartomten agrees, "that is the current fashion, so [the size of the watch] is not the same problem it used to be. In fact, ours isn't the largest watch out there anymore; we were just ahead of the curve."

Hundreds of people are involved in the manufacture of Yes watches; it's a virtual worldwide company that starts in California with Kartomten and his two assistants, and continues to the East Coast, where their three investors—"angels," according to Kartomten—live. The scope of their manufacturing represents a truly international effort. Yes watches incorporate Swiss movements, European sapphire crystals and Japanese chips programmed in Hong Kong. Some parts are from Thailand, and the cases and bracelets are made and assembled in China. Kartomten adds, "In many ways, our manufacturing parallels what the Swiss companies are doing. All watch manufacturers want their products to bear the 'Made in Switzerland' label, but the truth is that labor costs in Switzerland are so high that even the Swiss are producing an increasing number of their component parts offshore. To minimally qualify as a 'Swiss Made' watch, only 50 percent of the components have to be of Swiss origin, so the Swiss watch is becoming more of a myth. Today the focus is on brand recognition, which is the key

FEATURES

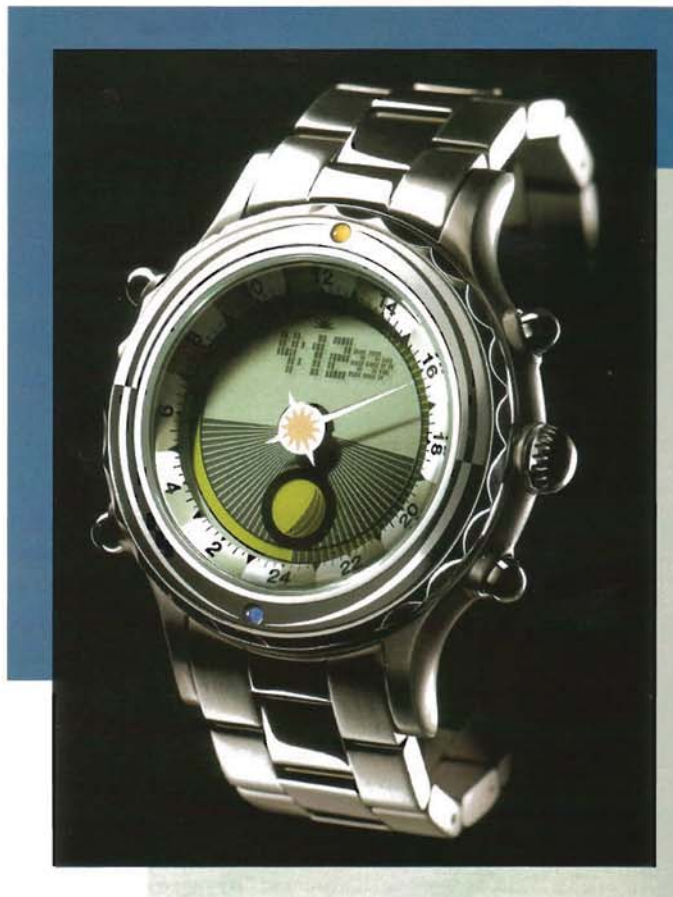
- Hours, minutes and seconds in AM/PM or 24-hour modes
- 24-hour analog hand
- Year, week and day of year
- City listing, longitude and latitude
- Automatic adjustment for daylight savings time with manual override
- 24-hour chronograph with lap time
- Phase elapsed time (PET), a NASA standard
- Alarm with ten-minute snooze
- Indigo blue night light
- Times of sunrise, solar high noon and sunset
- Sunrise alarm that chimes 30 minutes before and at sunrise
- Times of moonrise and moonset
- Lunar phase
- Percent of lunar illumination
- Times of next new moon and full moon
- Past and future date calculator for sun and moon data
- Outer yellow LCD ring that can display moonrise/moonset or sunrise/sunset in an alternate location
- Pre-programmed for 583 cities worldwide from 2000 through 2099
- Can be set by longitude/latitude
- Time in up to three locations
- Inca: 24-hour hand, 24-hour dial and tide symbol bezel
- Zulu: 24-hour hand, AM/PM dial with 24-hour bezel scaled for military time (aka Zulu time)
- Swiss quartz movement
- Sapphire crystal
- Titanium case and bracelet
- Screw-down case, water resistant to 333 feet or 100 meters.
- Case dimensions 48mm x 15mm
- Two-year limited warranty
- Packaged in wooden box with link adjuster tool, instruction manual and additional leather and rubber strap.

to the impeccable reputation the Swiss have earned."

The magic that makes Yes watches work is actually the result of many years of work collecting solar and lunar algorithms from the US Navy, NASA, astronomers and other sources. From those algorithms, Kartomten created a proprietary formula, which is loaded into each Yes watch and drives the tiny, daily, incremental changes to the LCD dial. Manufacturing the required microtechnology is a critical phase and requires extremely close tolerances. You end up with a timepiece that, once set, will calculate time, sunrise/sunset, moonrise/moonset and automatically adjusts itself for Daylight Savings Time. The benefits become evident once you begin wearing the watch.

"Our greatest challenge has been to come into the marketplace with a radically different concept in telling time, which must overcome all of our preconceived ideas—all the training we've received since we were five years old and learning to tell time," Kartomten reminds me. Although this re-education of the consumer has been his biggest challenge, Yes owners often become inseparable from their Celestial Chronographs after only the first day of wearing them.

I ask Kartomten why the watch-buying public did not react this way when digital timekeeping was introduced in the 1970s and cite the overwhelmingly positive response to the early Pulsar watch. "That watch didn't ask you to rethink your concept of time," Kartomten counters and then adds, "In fact, the Pulsar Time Computer represented the epitome of man-made time—it gave you little more than HH:MM:SS."



"What I have accomplished with the Yes watch cannot be achieved by purely mechanical means and certainly never in a wristwatch!"

—Bjorn Kartomten

When I ask him if there are any watchmakers working today who inspire him, Kartomten launches into an impassioned history lesson, "Without question, the two men who influenced me the most are John Harrison and Nevil Maskelyne," he says. "Back in the 1700s, the British were ruling the world, and they were sending their ships everywhere across the ocean. Unfortunately, they were frequently unable to determine their exact location at sea, and consequently they would have shipwrecks. Thousands of lives were lost; it was arguably the major catastrophe of that period. The British implemented a contest to see who could build an ocean-going clock that was accurate enough to be used in precisely navigating their ships. This person would be the hero of their day, and accordingly, they set a large reward for the winner—£20,000 in the year 1714."

Our interview concluded, I began fact-checking the history lesson. The £20,000 prize would be equivalent to more than \$3.5 million today. No doubt that kind of money would generate a lot

of interest from our generation of watchmakers! I also found myself cheering for John Harrison, the working-class English carpenter who accepted the challenge and sacrificed his lifetime to build the ultimate nautical clock and gain the recognition (and prize money) that seemed to evade him. Harrison developed a marine chronometer that erred by only 5 seconds on a two-month voyage from the West Indies to Jamaica. His spirit of innovation has been a constant source of inspiration to Kartomten.

One of Harrison's contemporaries, and a fellow competitor for the prize money, was the astronomer Nevil Maskelyne. In many ways Maskelyne was the polar opposite of Harrison: he belonged to the social elite, he was a member of the highly academic Royal Society of London, and he was a vocal opponent of Harrison because he believed strongly in his own methodology, which relied on measuring lunar distances. Maskelyne was a major proponent of the natural cycles of sun and moon; he was not impressed with clocks, which he considered artificial con-



above—Kartomten with daughter, Tatiana.
opposite—The Yes Inca Watch.

traptions. Kartomten strongly identifies with Maskelyne's insistence on the importance of the solar and lunar cycles, and he shares a birthday with him.

When I ask Kartomten if he considers their shared birthday a happy coincidence or thinks of it in terms of fate or destiny, he says, "Learning about this important chapter of history after creating the Yes design, I do find it quite remarkable, especially because my watch design resolves the apparent dilemma of man-made time versus natural time. And from history we observe that for these two men, a lot of passion went into their life's work—that passion is the common denominator for watch lovers around the world."

As we speak, Kartomten tells me about the new Inca he is wearing, which along with the Zulu, represents the latest Yes designs. The Inca on his wrist is one of only six in existence; the other five are being field tested before their planned launch.

The Zulu will appeal to the GMT watch enthusiast as well as a broad segment of wristwatch aficionados, while the Inca is an astronomer's dream watch. If you begin with first impressions—case and bracelet are completely crafted in titanium and weigh only 3.8 ounces, which represents 45 percent less weight than a stainless steel version—they ride light on the wrist. New features

include times for moonrise and moonset, more detailed lunar data for both watches, and the Inca features an approximate tide function. As you may already be aware, tide is tricky because it is in part a function of topographical features, so if you have contour issues, the high and low tide times can be off by as much as a couple of hours. Two mariners are testing that capability in Boston harbor right now. The LCD dial exhibits great contrast, and the special sapphire crystal is designed to afford a clear view of the dial and large digital time display from an angle.

Realizing how close Kartomten's office is to Hollywood, I can't help but inquire about star gazing of a different kind. "Are there any celebrities who wear Yes?" I ask. He replies carefully, "I don't know if we're on the A-list yet, but we do sell into the Hollywood community pretty regularly. Cinematographers are very dependent on the sunrise/sunset information when shooting film; often the best light occurs just after daybreak or just prior to sunset. A dozen of our watches were recently purchased for the *Charlie's Angels* film crew." The director of both *Charlie's Angels* movies is Joseph McGinty Nichol, or "McG" as he prefers to be called. Kartomten is reticent to drop names, a respectful habit he acquired while working with Robert Redford on the Sundance catalog; this is the only celebrity reference he consented to.

I am curious about whether Kartomten shares an interest in collecting watches, but he admits, "I don't collect watches—that's terrible, isn't it? One of the key turning points in my personal life was in the early '90s when my Rolex Submariner went overboard and plunked into the bay. It's okay, though—I'm sure King Neptune is enjoying wearing my watch now!" We both laugh at the image he has conjured.

I continue to ask about the hobbies or outside interests he might enjoy. After a few thoughtful moments he replies, "I have had a relatively diverse range of interests in my life, but right now this business is constantly 'go, go, go!' and I'm balancing my energy to be the best parent possible to my teenage daughter. I have always enjoyed boating. For ten years, I motored around in a 1963 Chris Craft Constellation, a 37-foot cabin cruiser with twin V8s—a real beauty."

Kartomten sums up his watchmaking philosophy, "To date we've sold about 5,500 units worldwide, and we have established a loyal customer base. We represent an alternative take on time—we are introducing the wearer to a broader universal time, which is about their individual time—which gives them the useful time data for wherever they may find themselves on this planet. Our timepieces exemplify value given their unique capabilities at an affordable price point."

"As long as men and women keep wearing watches, that little spot on the wrist will be reserved either for beauty or for watches—it will never be taken over by cell phones or anything else," he firmly insists before predicting, "I think that more and more people are going to fall in love with Yes watches." ♦

Interview and article by Roger Kosarski. To learn more about Yes watches, telephone 877.937.9282 within the US and 858.729.0703 outside the US or visit <www.yeswatch.com>.