

March 26, 2009

The two SEIKO fine watch studios. Dedicated to perfection.

The precious responsibility of crafting SEIKO's very finest timepieces is shared between two remarkable studios, one in the woods of northern Japan near Morioka and the other high in the mountains of central Japan. In recent years, these studios have created some remarkable timepieces whose technology, artistry and quality craftsmanship have generated great interest among watch enthusiasts worldwide, including the Grand Seiko 9S caliber, the Spring Drive Sonnerie and the Spacewalk chronograph.

The Shizukuishi Watch Studio. Home of mechanical watch excellence

For over 70 years, SEIKO's Morioka facility has consistently and continuously developed its watchmaking skills in every area of the art, and today is one of the very few watchmaking houses to build every single component of its mechanical watches, including the balance springs and mainsprings. In 2004, the Shizukuishi Watch Studio was added to the Morioka facilities and given the responsibility to further develop its high grade mechanical watchmaking as demand from collectors and mechanical watch enthusiasts grew. Today, the Studio, which takes its name from the village of Shizukuishi, has over 60 members, 19 of whom are Master Craftsmen, and there are currently over 20 different mechanical calibers in production at the Studio.



Each desk in the Studio is customized for the individual watchmaker to ensure the best working position.

The uniqueness of the Shizukuishi Studio is that it combines the very highest technology with hand craftsmanship of extraordinary quality. Thus, the most advanced miniaturization technology allows balance springs of 0.03mm to be made here while in the same facility, master engravers are at work, creating patterns on the movement bridges to a depth of just 0.15mm and modifying curves to within a tolerance of 0.01mm, by hand and eye alone. The Shizukuishi Watch Studio is a true 'manufacture' in every sense.



Mamoru Sakurada mounting the balance into the 1.98mm Credor movement. (left)
 Kiyoshi Terui engraves a Credor watch in his own style, and using tools he himself created. (center)
 Akira Ohira adjusts the balance of each and every Grand Seiko movement. (right)

This fusion of high technology and hand craftsmanship is more than a matter of professional pride in Shizukuishi. It brings real benefits to owners of Studio's creations. In 1998 when the celebrated 9S movement was born, its extended power reserve (50 hours) and proven high accuracy (+5 to -3 seconds a day) were achieved though the combination of cutting edge CAE / CAD / CAM and the adjustment skills of craftsmen recognised as among the very best in the world, including Mr. Sakurada and Mr. Terui, both of whom have been awarded craftsmanship awards by the Emperor of Japan.

The respect for tradition and quality extends to even the furniture. Every desk is customized for its user and is made from a traditional Japanese wood, 'Iwayadou Tansu', coated in a locally made lacquer to give each desk a luxurious and calm atmosphere.

The Shizukuishi Watch Studio' s vision says it all: "Building in quality with painstaking care"



The Studio and the whole Morioka facility is fully engaged in environmental protection. It achieved ISO 14001 accreditation in 1997 and 'zero emissions' in 2004.

The Shinshu Watch Studio. Creating watches that deepen in character over time.

The visitor to the Studio is first impressed by its location. The small town of Shiojiri is high in the mountains of Nagano Prefecture in central Japan, and through every window, the Hida, Kiso and Yatsugatake mountains look down on the Studio, their height seemingly increased and their distance foreshortened by the cleanliness of the mountain air. The Studio takes its name, Shinshu, from the former name for Nagano.



This modern facility houses the most traditional craftsmanship Studio.

Once inside, the eye is drawn to the many landmark timepieces that the Studio has created since its inception in the late 1990's. The Credor Spring Drive Sonnerie and the Spring Drive Spacewalk are proudly displayed around the extensive premises, in addition to many important pieces from SEIKO's historical collection. The Shinshu facility houses three separate studios that, together, contain every aspect of the watchmaker's art.



For over 30 years, the craftsmen in the Jewelry Studio have worked with precious stones and metals, using traditional European and Japanese techniques.

The main studio (called 'Takumi', or Mastery) assembles and adjusts all the Spring Drive and other high-grade movements made by this Shiojiri facility. The jewelry studio works the precious metals and stones used in many SEIKO and Credor jewelry watches and effects the diamond cutting of the hands and indexes as well as the 'blade' polishing of watches like the new Ananta.

Lastly, the Micro Artist Studio is home to an elite group of just 10 master craftsmen who make individual timepieces, including the Spring Drive Sonnerie, whose 5-per-year production is already reserved by customers for the next two years. It also made the Credor Spring Drive "Eichi" whose 'Torque Return' system was a highlight of Baselworld 2008. This studio is a small but complete 'manufacture'. The Micro Artists plan, design, manufacture, assemble and regulate all their watches themselves.



In the 'Takumi' Studio, the air is kept dust-free with ventilation in the ceiling, floor and behind each desk.

The Shinshu Studio has a very clear vision of its purpose. All 180 qualified technicians share the dream of making watches whose beauty and practicality are the most durable and long-lasting in the world. Their goal is to make watches whose design is impressive at first sight, but which are so well made, practical and durable that their appeal grows with the years.

A sign hangs nonchalantly outside the door to the Micro Artist Studio. It describes, in both Japanese and English, the philosophy and mission of the whole Shinshu Studio, including the words "Our watches bring long-term satisfaction, the feeling of Japanese and are reliable to wear until grandchildren."

Having seen the range of skills, the depth of dedication of the craftsmen and the high technology movement design that supports their work, every visitor to Shinshu will most definitely agree.



Each craftsman in the Micro Artist Studio has his own hand-craft set of tools, many of which are custom-made. The tools are sharpened every day.