



## A TIMELESS LUXURY

Woo Enyi might have been an unwilling participant in the family business when he joined in 2012, but over the last six years, he has developed a certain interest in it, “but only to a certain extent,” qualifies the 32-year-old. However, in the watch industry, he has already made a name for himself. He reveals that he is known as the “crab” – a reference to his penchant for “not following the rules”. But moving away from established industry practices appears to be working out well for the Creative Director of H2 Hub. The company is

fast becoming a retail powerhouse for timepieces, representing over 40 specially-curated international brands. It also manufactures and distributes its own brands of watches.

H2 Hub transited fully to the watch business in the early 1980s, from its beginnings as a clock manufacturer. The 1988 financial crisis affected the bottom line and it spent the next two decades and more, from 1989 to 2012, rebuilding its business. It was during this time that Enyi was persuaded by his father and brother, who were already in the company, to join them after he graduated from Singapore Management University, where he had read Human Resources (HR). “My father, brother and I all have the same ‘character’ – we tend to take on too many projects,” he says wryly, on why he agreed to give them a helping hand.

On his first day at H2 Hub, his father told him his job scope was to do “anything and everything” that needed doing. With this flexible job description, he “attached” himself to different divisions in turn, familiarising himself with the ins and outs from manufacturing to wholesale and retail. He went to the manufacturing facilities, met with various brand principals, and visited H2 Hub’s retail outlets; he also attended industry fairs and mingled with tradesmen at events. At the head office, he learnt the requirements of the different functions spanning sales and marketing, logistics, product development and design, HR and finance. The immersion provided him with the essential foundation and knowledge that would underlie his strategies to bring the company forward.

### Joining the dots

Having experienced the full spectrum of work, including “sweeping floors and arranging displays” to crunching the numbers, Enyi soon realised that the biggest margins resided in having their own brands, where they could exercise “control” over the entire process. He revived their in-house Aries Gold brand by kick-starting a new series, with him as the main designer. Naysayers pointed out the uphill task of building a house brand and trying to wrest market share from established industry names, but the “crab” in him surfaced – he believed calculated risks were necessary and that “the dots will join up and make sense” eventually.

His was not a rash decision made without basis. In his own words, “if something is difficult, it tends to be sustainable as others cannot replicate it easily; there is therefore less competition”. The consistent double-digit growth figures for Aries Gold bears testimony to this rationale, though more remains to be done to further this channel of revenue. His dream is to elevate H2 Hub’s in-house brands to garner “the same respect” as the European brands, and be “recognised” as an Asian designer of quality, bespoke timepieces.

When asked about the price points for the in-house brands, namely, Aries Gold and the recently-launched Wulf, he responds with the descriptor – “they should be premium-looking but affordable”, which is an acknowledgment of his father’s own humble beginnings. “Times were much harder then, and my father’s dream, when growing up, was just to have a watch of his own.” This influenced his views about luxury, which he defines not by price but as the “free will to pick your own style”. Again, the “crab” detracts from industry norm where luxury, customisation and price often go hand-in-hand. To him, a timepiece that is tailored to someone’s distinct preferences *is* a “luxury” timepiece, no matter the price.



### Timed for expansion

Good or bad, it can all be found in a family business, offers Enyi. Family members are “warm” and “welcoming”, and there is “a sense of unity that’s hard to find elsewhere”. However, this family culture is also a flaw as “governance, which every company should have, is weak”. There is no corporate structure and “things are not clear”.

One item on his to-do list is to corporatise the company. “To be successful, we need to have the right corporate culture and core values, and these encompass accountability, innovation and customer service.” To this end, the company has embarked on “talent building” to nurture a strong leadership team to drive change. To optimise synergies, the Creative Director is promoting from within, and has started grooming department heads who can make improvements in their respective areas. “They think somewhat like me but are a lot smarter than me,” he shares.

Accountability should be integral to an organisation and all it does, according to Enyi. In fact, he considers it the “single key trait of progress” as it is all-encompassing. “If someone is accountable, he can be relied on to do his best for the good of the company.” In an industry where “incentives” (bribes) are not uncommon, especially in the purchasing function, he iterates that integrity, honesty and “treating people right, including our staff and distributors” all form part of H2 Hub’s guiding principle. A KPI system will soon be introduced to give weight to this, as part of the firm’s broader corporatisation journey.

The KPI system will measure different deliverables for the various departments. Enyi elaborates that on the retail front, for example, customer service will rank higher than sales figures. “We value return business over one-off transactions.” Better customer service, delivered by the frontline staff, will contribute to brand building and complement the company’s existing programmes to deepen customer relations.

H2 Hub’s focus on people is engrained in its mission statement, which is to “empower people”. This is borne out throughout the company and “how we do business,” clarifies Enyi. Staff are encouraged to grow towards their potential while customers are empowered by new knowledge about timepieces, which the company provides.

### Watch out, here we come!

To someone who draws inspiration from other industries, the watch industry is “quite conservative” and “things move slowly” – too slowly for the multi-tasking “crab” who draws his inspiration from industries such as fashion and beauty, which evolve at breakneck speed. Although he understands the constraints



– a watch comprises more than 20 distinct parts and requires the collaboration of up to eight or nine different suppliers, and this is just counting the manufacturing process – he does not allow it to slow him down as he juggles voluminous tasks daily.

With so many on-going projects, it is easy to get distracted. To mitigate this, Enyi makes a conscious decision to “focus on the passion, on why we are doing something”. Each week, he sets aside an hour to “centre” himself, reviewing whether he has “deviated from what I need to do”. Thus refreshed, he will resume tapping on his passion as a “pivot” to support his actions at work.

These are exciting times for H2 Hub, the Creative Director discloses. In addition to strengthening the internal company structure, populating the leadership pipeline and advancing its core business, something “truly disruptive” is timed to hit the market at end-2018, cementing the company’s place in the industry. With that, the self-professed perfectionist refuses to say more.