

STYLE & FASHION

COMPLICATIONS: NOT ON MY WATCH

Continued from page D1
 “I think the dress watches are at the moment coming through a very strong revival,” said Alexander Schmiedt, managing director of watches at Montblanc Meisterstück. “You had a time until 2007, 2008, where [a watch] couldn’t be bigger. The bigger, the louder, the better. And now we’ve come back to a lot of classic, refined and slim [timepieces].” Mr. Schmiedt reported that Montblanc’s Star Classique line, which made its debut, in 2012, as an even more minimal version of the 1997 Classique series, was one of the brand’s most successful launches since it began making watches 17 years ago.
 Watch-enthusiast website Hodinkee has been waving the flag of time-only simplicity for

‘You had a time until 2007, 2008, where it couldn’t be bigger. The bigger, the louder, the better.’

In the past several months, and a post about the Trésor De Ville prompted raves from its readers. “People are still freaking out over it,” said Benjamin Clymer, the site’s founder and executive editor. “They think it’s the most beautiful thing.”

As for the shift from complicated to simple, Mr. Clymer said, “It sort of goes along with the whole vintage revival, which, in many ways, is about the search for pure design.” Indeed, the quest for simplicity and elegance is partly retro-skewed. Eagle-eyed watchspotters and fans of classic midcentury men’s fashion zeroed in on the elegant Omega Seamaster De Ville that Don Draper wore in the last season of “Mad Men.” And certain popular dress watches are slightly tweaked versions of timepieces that were launched



The Clean Camp
 Three high-powered watch purists: (from left) Joe Biden who owns Vulcain’s Cricket; chef Eric Ripert, who owns Vacheron Constantin’s Patrimony in platinum; and former GE CEO Jack Welch who owns Patek Philippe’s Calatrava.



1 Patek Philippe Ref. 5227J Calatrava, \$35,400, Patek Philippe at Tiffany & Co., 212-605-4036 2 Antea 365 A10 Watch, \$943, stowa.com 3 Star Classique Date Watch, \$2,475, Montblanc, 212-223-8888 4 Slimline Automatic Watch, \$2,475, frederique-constant.com 5 Carrera Calibre 5 Automatic Watch, \$2,900, tagheuer.com 6 Patrimony Platinum Watch, \$33,700, Vacheron Constantin, 877-701-1755. // ON THE COVER Patek Philippe Ref. 5227G Calatrava, \$37,300, Patek Philippe at Tiffany & Co., 212-605-4036

decades ago, like Patek Philippe’s Calatrava (\$37,300 in rose or white gold, \$35,400 in yellow), based on a design from 1912, and Vacheron Constantin’s Patrimony watch (\$33,700 in platinum), first seen in 1955 and retooled in 2004 with more assertive lugs and a larger beveled bezel.

Both exemplify why such mechanical pieces are no less deserving of attention than something that wears its achievements on its sleeve. When it was launched, Vacheron’s Patrimony was, at 1.6mm, the thinnest mechanical movement ever made. However, Vacheron CEO Juan Carlos Torres’s description of typical Patrimony buyers diverges from the stereotype of the high-powered executive who routinely picks up five- and six-figure watches. “They are people who appreciate

lines, aesthetics,” Mr. Torres said. “A lot of art people, architects, musicians, fashion designers—I cannot tell you who—are asking for this watch. It isn’t only about social status. It’s about intellectual status. It’s totally different.”

That sentiment is echoed by Patek Philippe’s U.S. President Larry Pettinelli. “Our customers aren’t usually trying to show the world that they’ve made it,” he said of the Calatrava. “Most people don’t recognize our watches from 10 feet away unless they’re collectors.”

The buyer who doesn’t want the bragging rights of a highly complex toy and isn’t agog at technical marvels clearly has different priorities. Jason Perri, the chairman of beauty app Glamsquad, falls into that camp. He wears a clean, sporty Rolex Submariner sans date. “It’s a good-looking watch that doesn’t look like a dinner plate,” he said. “I’ve seen guys take their watches off to reveal the glass back with an impossibly complicated thicket of gears and then you hear about the minute repeater and how it costs \$100,000. Most of us are thinking, I’d rather roll up in a [Aston Martin] DB7 Vantage and a Swatch.” Like-minded observers dismiss guys whose watches are riddled with unused features as poseurs. “If you scuba dive, it’s advisable to have an instrument that

tells you how long you’ve been under, but to only have the gear makes you look silly,” said Fredrik Carlström, founder of Austere, a Scandinavian design shop in Los Angeles. Mr. Carlström owns a few watches, including a vintage dress Jaeger-LeCoultre on a black alligator strap that he tends to wear only for formal occasions. Even complicated-watch fans are starting to acknowledge the absurdity of certain gizmos, according to Sol Meller, president



So Simple It Might Make You Late for Work
 This handsome watch, based on the sundial, tells time nearly to the minute—but only after you learn how to use it. Abacus Watch, between \$179 and \$295, abacus.com

EXTREME TIME-TELLING

There are absurd and amusing creations on both ends of the watchmaking spectrum



So Complicated It Can Win You the Jackpot
 Part of Christophe Claret’s Gaming series, this watch can orchestrate a 52-card game of poker, while the back offers roulette. Oh, it also tells time. Christophe Claret Poker Watch, \$193,000, Wynn and Company Watches, 702-770-3411

of Feldmar Watch Company, a retailer in Los Angeles. “I think clients still appreciate the designs of the heavier, bulkier pieces, but they’re saying they don’t need the extras,” said Mr. Meller. “They don’t need a tachymeter—a complication that measures the speed the wearer is moving over a given distance. They’d rather have something that fits under their sleeve.”

Another advantage of time-only watches is, of course, be their relatively affordable

prices. A solid entry option in the dress category is Montblanc’s Star Classique, which goes for \$2,475 (with a metal bracelet). Then again, since watches like these are the antithesis of trendy, there’s a case for making a smart investment in, say, a Calatrava or a Patrimony. “Vacheron and Patek have been around through plagues and wars,” said Hodinkee’s Mr. Clymer. “The watches they made still look great to this day.”

IN DEFENSE OF COMPLEXITY

Isn’t time enough? Not when watchmakers are constantly seeking the next breakthrough in mechanical art

WHILE SOME MAKE the case for simple watches over those with superfluous tachymeters and moon phases, complications will never cease to have their ardent supporters, of which I—as an horological expert who’s written about watches for The Wall Street Journal since 2003 and authored two books on the subject—am one.

Who needs complex features that go beyond telling time? Well, it’s not about necessity. Complications are an expression of “the better angels of our nature,” of the urge for more knowledge and the desire to perfect and improve what we have invented. New complications are always being created, like the first altimeter and barometer to be made for a mechanical on last year’s Brevia Genié 01. The development of complications embodies the same irrepressible human spirit that took mankind from the Wright brothers’ flying machine to jets.

The most intriguing complications are those known as astronomical. The more intricate ones keep track of equinoxes, solstices, seasons, signs of the zodiac and the



Watchmaker extraordinaire Kari Voutilainen at work.

changing date of Easter. Astronomical complications can connect a watch to other worlds, displaying the planetary orbits or sidereal time (that is, time told by the position of a bright, charted star). The most popular one shows the phases of the moon.

Then there are chronograph complications, which measure intervals of time like stopwatch. The business of constructing these demands knowledge of watchmaking, physics, engineering, geometry, mathematics

and metallurgy. Strap on a chronograph and you are wearing one of the supreme achievements of mechanical art. Press a button to start the complication and you can feel the whir of its wheels on your wrist.

Skeptics aside, some complications really can make a watch more useful. Repeater watches, which chime the hours and minutes with tiny hammers and gongs at the push of a button, were a necessary function when only candles dimly lit our nights. Today, the orderly, gentle sound of repeaters offer aural respite from the noise of modern life and come in handy when you can’t find your cellphone during a blackout.

Another complication—a secondary time zone, is relevant for any frequent flier. Wherever you are in the world, glance at a watch with two time zones and you’ll get an instant snapshot of both your local time and the time back home—convenient if you want to phone the office or the family at home.

Sure, simple is beautiful, but I’ll bet your world of complications and sheer wonder.

—Michael Clerizo

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