

turn back time

THE FUTURE OF HAUTE HOROLOGY LIES IN
TAKING A STEP BACK IN TIME.

They say nostalgia just isn't what it used to be, but in the world of haute horology it's definitely a case of going back to the future. The watch industry took a big hit in 2009 when the financial tsunami that was the GFC swamped the world. In the aftermath, manufacturers and designers have grasped with gusto the 'less-is-more' concept and turned to the clean lines and classic designs of the past, with the 1950s, 60s and early 70s especially popular.

Some models are faithful reissues of originals, while others blend the cool aesthetics of those eras with 21st Century engineering smarts. The battle cry at the last Baselworld Watch Expo, the Olympics of the watch industry, was for smaller, understated pieces. So, let's take a leisurely journey literally through time, by way of these mechanical masterpieces.

PATEK PHILIPPE CHRONOGRAPH

From Patek Philippe, an independent family-owned Swiss company considered by many to be at the apex of haute horology, comes this stunning men's column-wheel chronograph in a yellow gold case with rectangular pushers that hark back to the brand's famous 1940s and 50s wrist chronographs. What has watch-lovers really excited is the 39mm Chronograph's superlative all-new hand-wound CH 29-535 movement, a caliber that has taken five years of painstaking work to perfect.

Another feature is the instantaneously jumping 30-minute counter as well as the 269-part movement with no less than six patented engineering innovations. Yours for a cool \$154,000.

MAURICE LACROIX REGULATEUR ROUE CARREE

You can't fit a square wheel into a round watch, can you? Well, yes and this ingenious novelty – as watchmakers like to call their creations – displays the hours via a square wheel device. This is a first for mechanical watches and took thousands of man-hours to perfect due to the extremely complicated calculations to get the gear assembly right. So tiny are the components, they were made using a revolutionary process combining photo-lithographic and electro-forming techniques. With a 48-hour power reserve and using Maurice Lacroix's in-house ML 153 movement, this highly collectible piece, water-resistant to 50m, is finished nicely in black gold. Only 99 have been made and they retail at \$15,640.

ETERNA EIGHT-DAYS MADISON

The Eterna brand has been prominent in haute horology since the 1850s but possibly its biggest claim to fame is creating the ETA mechanical movement, used today in one in every two Swiss models. ETA is now part of the Swatch Group while Eterna also has a new master, Porsche Design. Eterna still makes beautiful pieces under its own brand, though, and the innovative Eight-days Madison (so named because the caliber can run non-stop for more than a week) makes use of the company's Spherodrive design, a novel spring barrel design rotating on ball bearings. According to Eterna, the result is less wear and tear on the watch movement and greater longevity and reliability. The tonneau case, with its cobbled-texture centre and sunray pattern surround, echoes classic watches of the 1930s and 40s. Yours for around \$6500.

ZENITH EL PRIMERO

Zenith's El Primero legendary chronograph movement, which takes 20 watchmakers nine months to complete, dates back 50 years and is rated by many observers as the best ever made. At Baselworld, the Swiss company that is now part of the LVMH group, unveiled a new variation. They presented the Striking 10th – the first in the prestigious line featuring a 1/10th of a second chronograph, incredible accuracy for a mechanical watch. The 42mm piece has a 50-hour power reserve and date indicator at 6 o'clock. Like all Zenith pieces, El Primero will be savoured by collectors, particularly as only 500 are being produced. The price should be around \$12,000.

RESSENCE PLATFORM WATCH

The minimalist look of this piece is not its only attraction, as Belgian industrial designer, Benoit Mintiens, has turned the whole concept of the wristwatch on its head. Instead of the hands rotating around the face, the time is displayed on rotating discs, much as moons orbit around a planet. Mintiens, whose design portfolio is eclectic to say the least (from high speed trains to barbecues to medical appliances), says his experience outside the Swiss watch industry helped him come up with the concept. Securing suppliers to help with the prototype took a year and at Baselworld he displayed three working prototypes for the 42mm Platform, which is powered by a modified automatic caliber. The Platform in titanium is a steal at \$20,675.

