



OLD TIMERS & NEW FACES

PRIVATSELECTION

A long history and a proven track record means a lot, but you shouldn't ignore exciting new blood. Keith W Strandberg looks at heritage and innovation in the watch industry

TODAY'S WATCH INDUSTRY INCLUDES RELATIVE NEWCOMERS like Franc Vila, Richard Mille, British Masters (Arnold and Son and Graham), Louis Moinet, Badollet and Hautlence alongside established brands with more than a hundred years of history like Vacheron Constantin, which is an amazing 255 years old, Jaeger-LeCoultre, which celebrates the 80th anniversary of its iconic Reverso this year, Audemars Piguet and Patek Philippe. The good news is that you don't have to choose between them – watch lovers embrace both the tried and true and the newcomers, buying incredible timepieces from all.

Established high-end brands like Patek Philippe and Piaget have a stellar track record, a known history and a reputation for unparalleled quality. They have weathered so many storms, people feel that they can't go wrong buying from any of these established brands. Many focus on traditional watches, to honour their legacy and satisfy their existing customers, and such classical designs will stand the test of time and stay wearable for years, even decades. These timepieces are heirloom pieces, watches that fathers will pass on to sons, generation to generation. However, they are committed to staying on top of technological developments, as well. Patek Philippe has been one of the leaders in new technologies, and Jaeger-LeCoultre has introduced more new, in-house designed and manufactured movements per year than any other brand.



*The Brevet Ottanta
Tourbillon by
Patek Philippe transforms
from a wristwatch to a
pocket watch and, as seen
here, to a table clock*



LEFT: the Harry Winston Histoire de Tourbillon No 2 is a limited edition of 20 pieces. The white-gold case features eight sapphire crystals.

BELOW: the Louis Moinet Astralis Tourbillon.

BOTTOM: the Badollet Tourbillon Stellaire features a Cape York meteorite baseplate and certified extraterrestrial olivines



Though limited by a need to keep their brand's DNA present in all their timepieces, these firms innovate in other areas, whether it be in new complications or new materials.

The younger independent watchmakers are free of the tethers of tradition and history. They don't have an established clientele that expects a certain kind of product, so they are free to develop whatever they want. They can think of new ways to do complications, new ways to read the time, new materials, new shapes and all manner of new concepts. As customers become more involved in timepieces, they naturally tend to look beyond established brands to see what other watchmakers are doing, and many collectors have embraced the new brands, snatching up every new model that comes along. Urwerk has stood watchmaking on its ear, with innovative time displays and

complications that include telescoping hands, owner time regulation and more.

Franc Vila is another brand that has made its mark with bold, anything-but-subtle designs and complicated movements, like tourbillons and minute repeaters. Franc Vila's timepieces are designed to be everyday watches, breaking all the rules for expensive, complicated timepieces. Other new brands have emphasised precision and fantastic finishing. Greubel Forsey, run by Englishman Stephen Forsey and French-born Robert Greubel, focuses only on tourbillons and has amazed the watch industry with incredibly precise inventions. Hautlence, based in Neuchatel, Switzerland, was conceived as an alternative to mainstream brands, while still focusing on the highest quality in watchmaking and materials. Using interesting movements with levers and



locomotive-like connections, Hautlence is out to redefine how time is read on a watch.

Some new brands have come from inside the industry. Hublot is a mainstream brand, but the firm, in order to have the ability to push the envelope of watchmaking, founded the Hublot Confrérie division. The sky's the limit for what the Confrérie, which means 'Brotherhood', can do. Another industry insider is Christophe Claret, who laboured for years in the shadows, making incredible complications for well-known brands. Now with his own Dual Tour, Claret is showcasing his company's phenomenal abilities and innovating within classical watchmaking. Richard Mille has turned heads for years with his incredible machines that combine watchmaking with engines and racing influences in cutting-edge designs. He has been visibly successful: Rafael Nadal wears a Richard Mille tourbillon while playing.

There are several brands that have recently been reborn after breaks in their histories. One key example is A Lange & Söhne, which was started in Glashütte, Germany in 1844, but after the trials and tribulations of wars and communism, lay dormant for decades. Revived 20 years ago by the last remaining Lange and the Richemont Group, the company is again a force in high-end watchmaking. Among other significant brand renaissances I would include Ulysse Nardin, Louis Moinet, Officine Panerai and Perrelet.

So while you won't go wrong with an established brand, the exciting new breed of watchmakers can also offer some totally original possibilities. In fact, with such a fantastic choice available, there has never been a better time to get into watches. ■■



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
the Christophe Claret Night Eagle Dual Tour; the Richard Mille RM027, worn by tennis player Rafael Nadal on court; the Urwerk UR-202 redefines the way time is read: incredibly, the minute pointer telescopes as the three-pronged hour wheel turns; the Hautlence HLQ04