

INDUSTRIALIZED WATCH PRODUCTION COMES TO DETROIT, USA

# MADE *In* AMERICA

**THE GOLDEN AGE OF AMERICAN INDUSTRIAL WATCH PRODUCTION STRETCHED FROM THE LATE 19TH CENTURY THROUGH THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY.**

Back then, watch production in America was the envy of the world, including the Swiss. By succeeding at industrializing fine watch production, American companies like Hamilton, Waltham, Elgin, E. Howard and others were able to offer quality timepieces to the masses for the first time in history. Of course, that was a long time ago, and, today, most production for American watch brands has moved to other countries, except for a handful of small, handmade concerns, including RGM, Devon Works, Towson and Bozeman—that is, until Shinola came on the scene. Introduced to consumers earlier this year, Shinola is a partnership between Bedrock Manufacturing (headed up by Tom Kartsotis of Fossil fame) and Ronda, a well-known Swiss movement manufacturer. The concept is to assemble and case Ronda quartz movements in America, adding as much American industrial romance and style as possible along the way. Shinola is now up and running with volume production based in, of all places, Detroit, Michigan.

*by Keith W. Strandberg*



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The 47-mm Shinola Runwell, \$600

**MOTORS FOR THE WRIST**

**BUT** WHY SET UP SHOP IN DETROIT WHERE DECADES OF ECONOMIC EROSION HAVE NOTABLY TAKEN THEIR TOLL?

“Part of picking Detroit was that we were assembling the engine of the watch, and what better place to do that than in the traditional heart of the auto industry, where so many engines have been produced?” says Heath Carr, CEO, Bedrock Manufacturing. “We knew we wanted to make our products in the USA, and now we have just over 25 people working in the Detroit factory and the capacity to assemble over 500,000 watches a year.”



Ronda’s main role in the project is to help set up the factory in Detroit and train the employees, as well as to provide the movement parts. According to Carr, Ronda ships all the components to Detroit, where the watches are assembled, cased and quality controlled. “The Shinola brand needed to have a differentiator, and having a movement that was assembled in Switzerland or Asia wasn’t going to be different enough,” Carr explains. “‘Built in Detroit’ is on the caseback of each of our watches, and I think people will make a connection with it.” Shinola products are also marked with a yellow lightning bolt, the brand’s symbol of high quality. “Every time we see it, and every time our partners see it, it’s a reminder to focus on the quality of the product,” Carr adds.

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—HEATH CARR



The Runwell’s numbered caseback



The 36-mm Gomelsky, \$495



The 34-mm Birdy, \$475



Runwell bicycle, \$2,950

Shinola’s factory is housed in Detroit’s historical Argonaut building, originally a GM facility that is now part of the College for Creative Studies. In a derivative nod to this history, Shinola’s first movement has been named the Argonite-1069. Workers all come from the local community, and many of their photos and stories are highlighted on the company’s website. Home-town connections like these are touted all across the brand’s communications.

**WATCHES AND MORE**

**THE** FIRST WATCH COLLECTION TO DEBUT WAS THE LIMITED EDITION RUNWELL, a vintage-inspired three-hand timepiece with a small subdial for the running seconds. This watch has already sold out. The range currently includes second-generation Runwell watches in four sizes. Other collections include the cushion-shaped Brakeman and the feminine Gomelsky and Birdy models. Prices for Shinola watches range from \$500 to \$800, and all of the watches will have quartz movements—at least to start. Carr isn’t ruling out mechanical watches as a future possibility, but he acknowledges the leap in difficulty that making mechanical watches on an industrial scale in the USA would represent. Meanwhile, in addition to watches, Shinola is making and marketing bicycles, leather goods and journals, using American materials and know-how. “We want to be in many different categories,” says Carr. “We decided to tackle the most difficult ones, watches and bikes, first.”

Keep an eye on Shinola. With great looking designs, a sold-out first watch collection and personalities like Kartsois and Carr behind the idea,

Shinola certainly has a real chance to succeed. For my part, I think a visit to Detroit is in order. I want to witness firsthand the return of American industrial watch manufacturing.

[shinola.com](http://shinola.com)



Leather iPad envelope, \$165



The 47-mm Runwell, \$550



*Popular Vernacular*

A HOUSEHOLD NAME, SHINOLA, AN AMERICAN-MADE SHOE POLISH, WAS SO POPULAR IN THE EARLY 1900S THAT IT BECAME PART OF THE AMERICAN LEXICON, WITH THE PHRASE “Doesn’t know sh’t from Shinola” COMMONLY EMPLOYED IN DESCRIBING STUPIDITY. FOR A MORE CLOSELY WATCH-RELATED BIT OF VERNACULAR SERVING A SIMILAR PURPOSE, THERE’S ALWAYS, “He doesn’t know whether to scratch his watch or wind his ass.”