

# Gentleman's Dress Watches

# INTRODUCTION

## The Prince of Wales, 1935, Top Hat and Fred Astaire

In the English speaking world Formal Evening Dress, “Top Hat, White Tie and Tails” is strictly regulated:

- Black or midnight blue dress coat (commonly known as an evening tailcoat) with silk (grosgrain or satin) facings, horizontally cut-away at the front
- Trousers of matching fabric with one single wide stripe or two narrow stripes of satin or braid in the United States and Europe, worn with braces. (Suspenders in the U.S.)
- White plain stiff-fronted cotton shirt (usually cotton Marcella, known as piqué in the U.S.)
- White stiff detachable wing collar
- White bow tie (usually cotton Marcella)
- White low-cut waistcoat (usually cotton Marcella, matching the bow tie and shirt)
- Black silk socks or stockings
- Black patent leather court pumps (with black silk bows)
- Miniature decorations, if so entitled.

Many menswear authorities assert that the bottom of the waistcoat should not be visible below the front cutaway of the tailcoat. This has been the prevalent view in the United States since the 1920s, where Fred Astaire popularized the look of the unbroken black line from head to toe thereby lengthening his silhouette on-camera. The Astaire look was created from the evening wear worn by the young British Princes of the Blood sons of George V<sup>th</sup> to London Night Clubs such as the Café de Paris in the late 1920s. Full evening dress is the most conservative form dress for men and has changed little since the 1860s when under Prince Albert, of the chain, the bottom of the waistcoat was visible below the cutaway of the tailcoat.

Full evening dress or white tie is traditionally considered correct only after 6 p.m. however some etiquette authorities allow for it any time after dark even if that means prior to 6 p.m. The equivalent formal attire for daytime events is morning dress; a less formal evening counterpart of white tie is black tie.

Remarkably, the finest chapter in the history of evening dress was the Great Depression for at a time of extreme financial hardship, the wealthy elite maintained an after-six wardrobe that was not only profoundly elegant but at times decadent. In 1935 a New York Herald Tribune society writer calculated that a “well-attired” New York gentleman’s evening kit could be worth as much as \$4,975 once his jewellery and fur coat were accounted for. It was this glamorous lifestyle that Hollywood capitalized upon when catering to a world desire for Depression escapism and in the process white tie and tails was elevated to iconic status.

Silver-screen elegance became more affordable to the average man thanks to the increased availability of ready-to-wear clothes which were first mass-marketed by Philadelphia tailors S. Rudofker’s Sons, predecessor to industry giant After Six. Even more economical was the newly established option of simply renting one’s formal wear on a daily basis from firms such as Moss Bros in London. As a result, Rudofker jubilantly advertised in 1930 that the habit of dressing for the occasion previously confined to the “idle rich” had now expanded to include the masses.

Lastly, there was the impact of style. For nearly a century British male apparel had been focused on appearing respectably inconspicuous. A youthful extravagance born of the jazz age and the Flapper was epitomized by a young and stylish British Prince of Wales, soon to liberate menswear from such constraints.



*The Prince of Wales own Midnight Blue, White Tie, dress suit by his London Tailor Scholte, the shirt with mother of pearl studs. The Dress Albert chain with matching watch and cigar cutter to fit in the tailored starched white waistcoat were not sold with the suit at Sothebys.*

The Prince's debonair colour preference of Midnight Blue for after-six attire was imported to America by Hollywood and was all the rage by the mid-thirties. At first limited to the less formal variations of evening wear its popularity quickly expanded until by 1934 menswear periodicals were promoting this colour for all types of evening dress. In 1935 it was reported that mills making fabrics for formal dress expected sales of midnight blue to equal or even exceed those of black that season. Their predictions proved true and by the late thirties etiquette and sartorial pundits were announcing that this previously alternative colour was now the primary choice for dress suits and dinner jackets alike. The Prince of Wales own Midnight Blue White Tie is illustrated.

### **The Waistcoat**

"Waistcoats have become a high style item," observed Apparel Arts in 1933. "No more of the thick ill-fitting affairs but today a suave and sleek arrangement." Gentlemen continued to personalize their evening suits with waistcoats of the traditional full-back style or the newer and more comfortable backless design introduced in the previous decade by the Prince of Wales. In 1936 Esquire was reporting that his creation was the preferred choice in London and rapidly gaining favour in the U.S. It was the sleek look of the starched body hugging white tie waistcoat that caused the creation and introduction of the wafer thin dress watch probably by Cartier for their Royal patron.

The 1920s fashion of wearing a full-dress waistcoat with the informal dinner jacket remained popular in London and France at the decade's opening thanks to its frequent appearance on the Prince at Continental resorts. However, by autumn 1933 the inaugural issue of Esquire was reporting that "The white waistcoat has at last been allowed to rejoin its lawful but long estranged mate, the tailcoat, and the new dinner jackets are matched with a waistcoat of the jacket material, with dull grosgrain lapel facing." The renewed popularity of the tailcoat in the latter part of the decade further reduced the appeal of the mixed-breed combination although some etiquette experts would continue to recommend it as a formal middle ground for decades to come.

Not content to simply improve the comfort of the full-dress waistcoat, the Prince of Wales also upped the ante on its style. Like the full-dress shirt's studs and links, the waistcoat's buttons were traditionally made from mother of pearl in order to blend in with the garment's white fabric. Consequently, when the Prince appeared at London's exclusive Embassy Club with black waistcoat buttons well-dressed men took notice. Above the waistcoat the Prince favoured a tall shirt collar which necessitated a wide opening and very broad tabs that were slightly wider than the bow tie. Plain linen remained popular during the era despite the growing trend for the shirt front, waistcoat and bow tie to be made of matching piqué.

White dinner jackets premiered alongside the mess jacket in warmer climes at resorts such as Palm Beach and Cannes, albeit with much less fanfare. Constructed of cotton drill, linen or silk they were originally worn with either black or white trousers of tropical weight wool. Their popularity at tropical locales grew slowly but surely and by the time the mess jacket had become passé in 1936 they were as common as traditional dark jackets. In its August 1936 issue, Esquire defined the quintessential warm-weather formal evening wardrobe:

"This year, the big swing is to single- or double-breasted [light coloured] dinner jackets, collar and self-lapel facings. These are worn with [black] tropical dress trousers, patent leather oxfords or pumps, a white, soft shirt with a soft or laundered collar and a black dress tie.

The reappearance in the late 1920s of the cummerbund fared much better thanks largely to its pairing with the popular mess jacket. By 1937 The New Etiquette was describing the garment as a "popular and chic" waist covering for informal evening wear at resorts. "It is meant for hot weather to obviate the necessity of having the harness of a waistcoat over the shoulder and back when it might be uncomfortably warm. On the right people at the right time it is decorative and correctly in the spirit of colourful gaiety".

## **Evening Accessories - The Pocket Watch as an Accessory**

### **The Fob and Dress Watch with Chains**

The mid-18th century marks the point when the English began to wear their timepieces in small "fob" pockets sewn either inside the waistband of their breeches or on the outside of their waistcoats.

When worn in the waistcoat pocket, the watch was attached to a watch chain. When worn in the breeches pocket, the watch was attached to a Fob so named after the pocket a strip of fancy fabric or rarely a gold linked strap that hung outside the waistband and was weighted down with the family seal and the watch key.

During the Regency era the waistband option was preferred to the waistcoat. As timepieces became thinner the practice of wearing them in the waistcoat pocket became the norm and was championed by Queen Victoria's husband Prince Albert who introduced a style of watch chain named after him. The "single Albert" chain was connected to the pocket watch at one end and the other end was attached to a waistcoat button thus creating a single "U" of draped chain between the pocket and button. The "double Albert" chain did not attach to the waistcoat but instead passed through one of its buttonholes (or a purpose-made hole) and was attached to a second object in Victorian times a Vesta case for Wax matches, kept in the other waistcoat (Vest) pocket, thus doubling the number of "U"s created by the draped chain. With this style there was often a very short piece of additional chain attached to the main chain at the buttonhole which would be used to carry a watch key and/or seal.

The fob continued to appear with evening wear until it fell out of favor after World War I which saw the introduction of the Wrist watch for ease of use in the trenches. A wrist watch with white Tie is frowned on. Esquire in January 1940, "The old fashioned Georgian seal watch fob has returned, and is worn on the left side for convenience".

### **Chains**

At the turn of the century there appeared an alternative method for storing the fob watch in one's evening trousers: the fine-link chain was described in *Etiquette for All Occasions* in 1901: "The watch is attached to a gold key-chain and concealed in the pocket. The chain is attached to the suspender or two chains are worn - from one hangs the watch, from the other the key; the greater portion of the chains and their appendages are concealed in trouser pocket".

Amy Vanderbilt's *1952 Complete Book of Etiquette* describes the dress watch white tie option at the twilight of their popularity: "Wrist watches, unless of delicate design and without a leather strap, are less likely to be worn with evening clothes. Instead, a thin watch, in gold or platinum, on a thin gold or platinum chain (or grandfather's good gold chain, which may be monumental but impressive) is worn. If any ill-advised woman should try to give a man a platinum chain with tiny diamonds between the links, he should return it to the jeweller who was talked into making it and go to Palm Beach on the proceeds or put them on the nearest fast horse".





*A Gentleman's evening wear equipage comprising:*

- *An enamelled wafer thin gold Cartier dress watch, with double loop Albert, Cartier chain, with waistcoat attachment swivel. The other end of the chain clipped to a wafer thin partially opened engine turned cigar or cheroot cutter.*
- *A pair of gold and enamelled Regimental cuff links.*
- *A set of white tie shirt and waistcoat buttons and studs in platinum mother of pearl and pearl.*
- *Grandpa's gold watch and fob chain with the family seal and crested watch key.*

*The whole ensemble in 18 carat gold or platinum never in silver and all at great extra expense enamelled.*

## THE COLLECTION

### Leon Hatot (1883-1953)

My collection of iconic art deco gentleman's dress watches commenced with the purchase through David Lavender of two important documented examples from the Atelier of Leon Hatot, sold at auction by Christie's (International) S.A. at the Hotel Richmond, Geneva, Wednesday, May 10 1989.

Born on 22 April 1883 at Chatillon sur Seine, Leon Hatot trained at the Ecole d'Horlogerie in Besancon from 1895 to 1898 before continuing his studies at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in the same town. In 1905, at the comparatively young age of 22 he was in business for himself specialising in watch case engraving, rapidly establishing a workshop with a dozen contemporaries producing watches and jewellery of high quality. To benefit from his success Hatot needed a branch in Paris and in 1911 he took over Mission Bredillard, whilst continuing to run large workshops in Besancon. For the next twenty five years Maison Hatot flourished as an important supplier of jewellery and watches to the principal jewellers of the Rue de la Paix and elsewhere. Their more famous clients can be included:

Asprey, Boucheron, Dunhill, Goldsmith's and Silversmith's Co., Van Cleef & Arpels, Vever, Mauboussin, Mappin & Webb, Ostertag, Janesich and Lacloche.

At the outbreak of war in 1939 Maison Hatot closed down their jewellery manufacturing workshops and the remaining stock was placed in the bank. It remained untouched until the beginning of 1989.

The stock included a range of objects dating largely from the years between the wars 1920-1939 but was by no means a completely representative selection of all the company's products. Every item was in unused condition, most retaining their contemporary stock labels or tickets and all straps and bracelets (where fitted) are original. Throughout, the standard of workmanship from the smallest ring to the most elaborate pendant is of the highest quality.

Hundreds of original designs survive, working drawings on paper, painted celluloid outlines and finished artwork, these remain in the firm's possession and would suggest that Maison Hatot, despite their lack of a 'retail' outlet was a leading influence on the jewellery styles of the 1920s and 30s.



Costs card for order no 2212 - Octagonal Watch Number 1.





## Louis Cartier (1875-1942)

The collection contains three signed Art deco Cartier dress watches all probably unique and of cutting edge design. A further unsigned example enamelled all over is almost certainly made for and retailed by the firm.

At the turn of the century the firm of Cartier was a family business in Paris selling fine jewels. In 1898 Louis Cartier joined his father and in 1899 the firm moved to their famous headquarters at 13 Rue de la Paix.

Since its inception the firm of Cartier ran an in-house facility to repair and create their customers jewels, commissions for special pieces were farmed out to independent workshops. Louis Cartier was well aware that outside manufacturing had to increase but this had to be achieved within the framework of exclusive contracts in order to protect his Cartier style and its cutting edge designs.

By 1900 Cartier was a respected, successful and fine jeweller with an international clientele. In 1906 Louis' younger brothers, Pierre and Jacques joined the Firm to create the team that would establish Cartier as the pre-eminent jeweller in the world. In 1906 Jacques moved to London to organise the present Cartier shop in New Bond Street. Pierre travelled to New York married an American socialite and opened on Fifth Avenue. The move to the present American headquarters at 653 Fifth Avenue took place in 1917.

Each brother exercised independent management and creativity within his own country with their respective designers, workshops and shops. The brothers had very different interests and abilities, the Cartier image was the key and they turned to Paris as the creative centre of a worldwide business. It was from Paris that Louis controlled the company's design and production. The advent of platinum which replaced silver allowed for a non tarnishing white metal finish so important in wearable watches.

Classic Art Deco geometric shapes as seen in Chinese architecture, the incorporation of Chinese designs often combined with the use of jade coral, onyx and enamel became the Cartier trademarks of the Art Deco period.



**Watch Number 3.** Wafer thin platinum cased, chinoiserie enamelled dress watch signed Cartier Paris, in original box. The engine turned dial and Breguet hands by the same dial maker as before. The movements by Jaeger LeCoultre. French circa 1925



**Watch Number 4.** Cartier, solid black onyx turned case with inset movement of platinum with gold numerals with Breguet hands to the engine turned dial, in original Cartier box. Signed Cartier France.

The creation of Cartier Mystery clocks by the firm of Couet is one of the classic examples of the outworking system as created by Louis Cartier in operation. Founded and directed by Maurice Couet, he was the man responsible for reviving Houdin's invention of the 'mystery clock' and transforming its 19th century design into the highly stylised and jewelled creation of the 1920s. The technique of manufacturing these clocks was as simple as it was baffling. In time the Couet mystery clock became a symbol of Cartier excellence just as the Imperial Egg stood for the best of Faberge.

A similar but lesser known move was made by Louis Cartier in Paris to employ as an outworker under an exclusive contract the watchmakers Jaeger LeCoultre.

In 1903 the Parisian watch maker Edmond Jaeger asked Jacques-David LeCoultre of Switzerland to manufacture ultra-thin watches to his design, out of this relationship emerged the ultra-thin gentlemen dress watch. The partnership ceased in 1937, when the Jaeger-LeCoultre brand, as a separate entity, was established.

In 1907 Cartier, a client of Jaeger's signed a contract with the Parisian watchmaker under which all Jaeger's movement designs for a period of 15 years would be exclusive to Cartier, the movements to be produced by LeCoultre. In 1907 the LeCoultre Calibre 145 set the record for the thinnest movement of all time at 1.38mm.

Louis Cartier is famous for the introduction of the wrist watch in 1911, for the flying of a plane precluding the use of a pocket watch. The Tank watch created in 1917 but first offered for sale in 1922, created a legend amongst wrist watches. The wrist watch was the commercial arm of the business the dress watch was a unique concept in male jewellery worn only with a "White Tie and Tails" its thinness being a requirement of line in the starched white waistcoat as worn by the Cafe Royal set to dinner.

The collection contains three signed examples, the fourth attributed to an unknown enameller is probably the iconic art deco octagonal watch of the period, impossible to sign because of the enamelling, it is difficult to open without fear of damage.





**Watch Number 5.** A very fine and rare Cartier Butterfly press button secret view, wafer thin, gold platinum and enamel gress watch. The engine turned dial and Breguet hands of standard form, by Jaegar Le Coultre. Paris circa 1930.



**Watch Number 6.** As a work of art this dress watch epitomises all that the art deco stands for. Difficulty of execution in terms of its flatness. The Art Deco hexagonal shape, far rarer than the octagonal but required for the 12 signs of the Zodiac. The standard of the enamelling by a yet unknown enameller initials S.R. or S.A.

*I have not opened the watch for fear of damage but I am suggesting Cartier, 1924, Paris Exhibition, Arts Decoratif.*

## Asprey

An Asprey catalogue of circa 1935 provides some contemporary retail pricing for a gentlemen's run of the mill dress watches.

The ultra-thin dress watch without any decoration, contained in a simple engine turned case was 150 pounds. A Prince Imperial dress watch made in staybrite steel was 15 guineas, the 9 carat gold example 26 pounds 5 shillings and in 18 carat gold, 36 pounds 15 shillings, giving the difference in price from the ordinary to the plain gold.

Asprey's standard commercial 18 carat ultra-flat dress watch by Audemer Piguet was 72 pounds and the top of the range engine turned example probably by Hatot cost 150 pounds. (see below)

Opening its doors in 1924 the Café de Paris quickly established itself as one of Europe's premier nightspots. Much of the early success was due to a visit from the Prince of Wales, who after an impromptu midweek visit became a regular guest bringing with him the crème de la crème of European society. The fusion of a beautiful and elite audience with energetic and ground breaking cabaret performances separated the venue from its rivals. The main aim of the Café De Paris was to see and be seen-and a white tie was the order of dress for the fashionable.

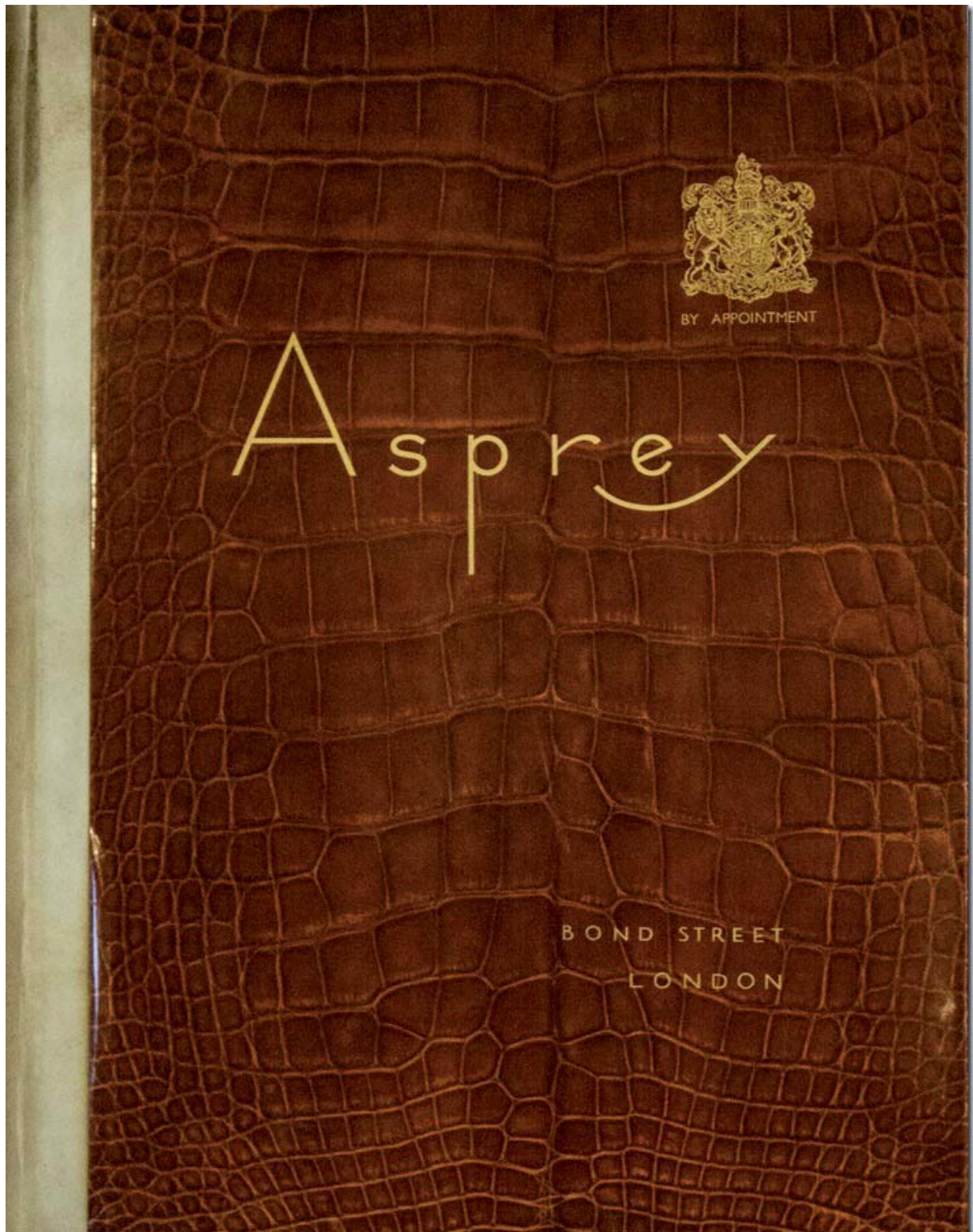
The success of the Café continued right through the 1930s, with a whole new host of powerful and successful figures joining the Café Society. The Aga Khan became a frequent visitor as did Lord and Lady Mountbatten, who nearly always ordered the same dinner of "a dozen and a half oysters and steak Diane". Due to its burgeoning reputation, the top vocalists and cabaret acts from around the world became easy to lure to the Café De Paris. The legendary Cole Porter became a regular, and used the venue not only to entertain the top singers of the time, but also to showcase his new songs, often for the very first time.

This catalogue proves the rarity and expense of these standard creations for a men's fashion accessory, which could be ordered from a catalogue.



*These three 18 carat gold dress watches were not bespoke but each cost between two and three years wages for a working man.*





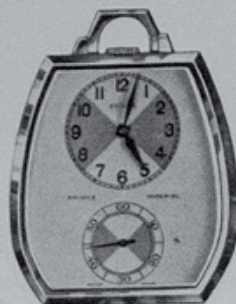
*Asprey Catalogue circa 1937.*



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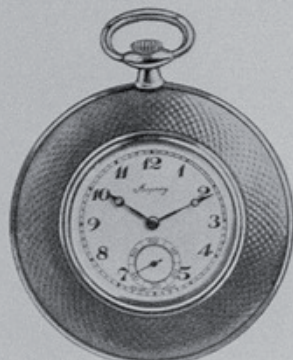
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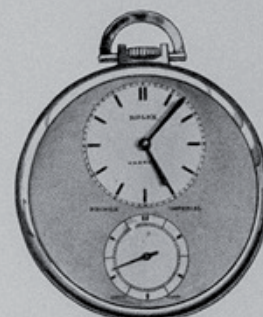
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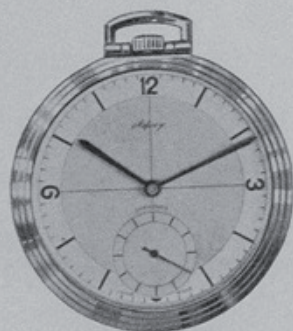
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## Patek Philippe

Patek Philippe founded in 1851 pioneered the perpetual calendar, split second hands, chronograph and minute repeater in watches. Like other Swiss watch manufacturers the company at this period produced mostly mechanical movements of the automatic and manual variety.

Patek Philippe made the worlds most expensive watch, an ultra-complicated (with 24 functions) pocket-watch for Henry Graves Jr., who entered into a friendly horological competition with James Ward Packard, which resulted in the production of the watch known as 'The Supercomplication' sold to Mr Graves in 1933. After his death the watch was auctioned at Sotheby's in December 1999 for US\$11,000,000 at that time the most expensive timepiece ever sold.



**Watch Number 7.** A platinum and diamond set dress watch in its original box by Patek Philippe, Geneva, circa 1939. This ultra thin watch is set with large baguette diamonds for the number markers with diamonds set into the band and loop to the case. A one off order produced irrespective of cost.

## Jules Jürgensen

Among the world's greatest watchmakers of the 18th and 19th centuries, members of the Jürgensen family, notably Urban and Jules, worked alongside other horological genius such as Houriet, Breguet, Berthoud or Arnold. They greatly contributed to the development of horology. The watchmaking family's roots stretch back to eighteenth century Denmark and Jörgen Jurgensen (1745 - 1811) founder of the dynasty. The most eminent watchmakers amongst his descendants are undisputedly his son Urban (1776 - 1830) and Jules-Frederik Jürgensen (1808 - 1877).

The latter two continued their father's business by founding Urban Jürgensen & Sønner. Jules moved to Le Locle, Switzerland while his brother Louis was in charge of the factory in Copenhagen. After Louis Urban's and Jules-Frederik's deaths, the company went through several more changes of ownership but continued the tradition of ultra-precise timepieces.

Following the wish of his father, the founder of the company, Urban Jürgensen spent a major part of his training as a watchmaker in Paris, London, Geneva and Le Locle in the Canton of Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

It was under his management that both pocket watches and precision timekeepers for navigation and astronomy made by the Urban Jürgensen company achieved international fame and recognition.

The Danish King, Frederick VI, granted him the Royal Appointment to supply the Court with watches and the Admiralty with chronometers.



**Watch Number 8.** A jumping hand and minute two colour gold engine turned dial dress watch by Jurgensen, in its original case. Swiss circa 1925.