

SPECIAL REPORT WATCHES & JEWELLERY

JEWELLERS WHO MAKE WATCHES

Fallout from a bauble ban

Companies are proving themselves adept at watchmaking, writes Simon de Burton

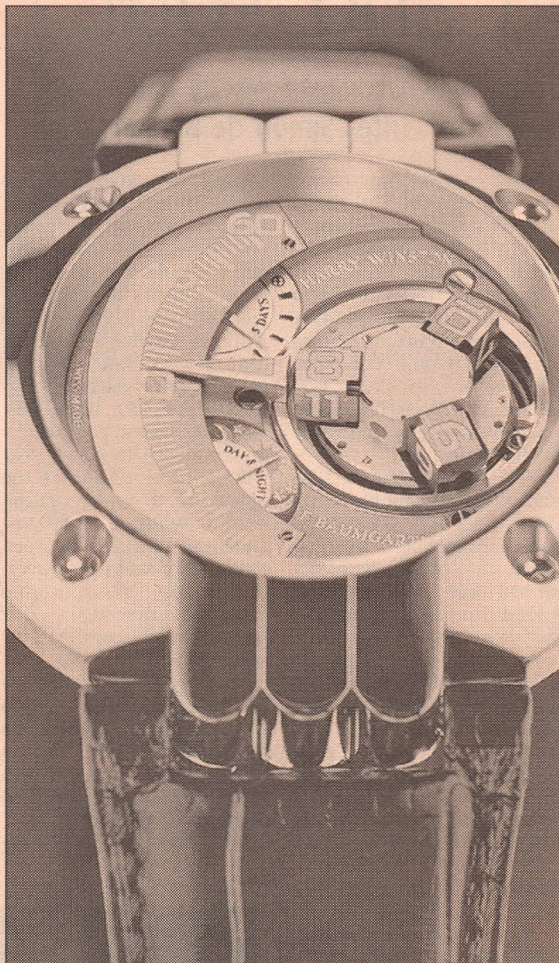
Jewellers have been making watches since the 16th century when many were forced to retrain as horologists after the puritanical John Calvin banned the Genevoise from wearing baubles. More than 500 years later and things have come full circle, with companies both ancient and modern which were originally established as jewellers proving themselves adept at making some extremely fine watches.

Among the first to do so was Cartier, which was founded in 1847 by Louis-Francois Cartier, the son of a virtuoso craftsman who specialised in making powder horns and engraving muskets for Napoleon's army. It was his grandson, Louis, who directed the company towards making watches in the early 19th century, after the Brazilian aviator and dandy Alberto Santos-Dumont asked for a wrist-worn timepiece which would be reliable in flight. The result was the Cartier Santos which, a century later and recently revamped, remains one of the world's iconic wristwatches along with the equally famous Cartier Tank.

In between, the jewellery house has produced the fabulous, lozenge shaped Benoit, the Dali-esque "Crash," the Tortue, the Panthere and the gem-studded Baignoire Allongee.

Perhaps the timepiece which most ably reflects Cartier's jewellery expertise, however, is the Tutti Frutti watch which is encrusted in an extraordinarily colourful frieze of sapphires, emeralds, rubies and diamonds – an ability to tell the time, you will gather, is not its primary function.

The American jeweller and sometime sword and medal maker, Charles Lewis Tiffany, however, thought he could not only tell the time but tell the Swiss how to tell the time back in the 1870s when he established a towering, five storey watch factory in the heart of Geneva. But making watches from scratch was not as easy as it seemed and Tiffany sold the factory to Patek Philippe, contenting himself instead



The Opus 5: on display at Baselworld for the first time

with creating watch designs of simplistic beauty fitted with other people's high-quality movements.

The low profile, high quality approach remained the norm in Tiffany watches for decades but the jewellery house has recently started to offer some far more interesting timepieces, such as the businesslike T57 chronograph, a certified chronometer contained in a case made from an unusual combination of vulcanised rubber and stainless steel.

The T57 is part of the Tiffany Mark collection which also includes simple but meticulously made hand-wound models, an exquisite "full calendar" with moon phases, an automatic chronograph, the super-accurate Regulator and, at the top of the range, a limited edition tourbillon.

The tourbillon, which houses the escapement in a cage to prevent inaccuracies caused by the effects of gravity, is considered to be one of the greatest complications in horology. So are these jewellers turned watchmakers getting ever so clever? For proof that they are, look no further than to Fawaz Gruosi's de Grisogono brand. Gruosi made his name as a jeweller in 1999.

The following year he turned his hand to a spot of light horology and launched the de Grisogono Instrumento Numero Uno, 300 of which sold in the first year of production. The range gradually expanded to the small Instrumentino, the two faced Instrumento Doppio, the Doppio Tre (three time zones), the oval shaped Tondo and the Chrono and Lipstick models. For 2005,

Gruosi decided to wow the world with his extraordinary Occhio Ripetizione Minuti, a design with a dial based on the operation of a camera diaphragm, costing €350,000.

For Bulgari, however, dovetailing jewellery-making with watch production took a little longer. It was not until the 1940s, about 30 years after the historic Bulgari store first opened in Rome's via Condotti, that the first Bulgari branded watches went on sale. The horological side of the business really took off during the 1970s, however, with the creation of the classic Bulgari-Bulgari watch (the one which says "Bulgari-Bulgari" around the bezel) which was followed by the founding of Bulgari Time in Neuchatel at the heart of Swiss watchmaking country.

The latest Bulgari Ergon sports watch is likely to be this summer's timepiece of choice among the Mediterranean yacht set, with its chunky case made from titanium, aluminium and rubber. A women's chronograph version comes with a mother-of-pearl dial and in a choice of colours with matching alligator skin strap. Van Cleef & Arpels, meanwhile, has been making watches for as long as it has been making jewellery, which is 95 years. Back then, it was considered infradigit for a woman to wear a watch, so the company created timepieces with hidden dials which it called "jewels which tell the time".

Has the great Harry Winston got into watches too? Of course, and in a big way. Harry Winston Rare Timepieces was set up by Ronald Winston about 16 years ago and, in 1999, opened its own manufacturing facility to make dials, cases and bracelets. As well as creating characteristically gem encrusted watches, the company is also known for its extraordinary and highly technical concept pieces (the Opus watches). The unveiling of the Opus watches has become a much anticipated annual event at the Baselworld show, where this year Harry Winston will show its Opus 5 for the first time.