



THE OAK COLLECTION INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION

FOUR DECADES OF WATCH COLLECTING PASSION REVEALED TO THE WORLD

The Design Museum
224-238 Kensington High St, London, W8 6AG
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Many owners of the finest, rarest and most valuable objects keep them under lock and key in virtual fortresses where they are jealously guarded and seldom - if ever - shared with the public.

But this spring a passionate horophile who has spent the past four decades quietly building what is undoubtedly one of the world's greatest privately-owned collections of wrist and pocket watches will make them freely available for all to see in a unique and remarkable international touring exhibition.

The OAK Collection exhibition - for 'One of A Kind' - comprises 160 'best of the best' vintage and contemporary museum quality watches, among which are unrepeatable special orders, ultra-rare limited editions, the most valuable examples of their type and the largest number of Patek Philippe pieces once owned by the celebrated collector Henry Graves Jnr. to now be held in private hands.

Every watch is in truly perfect condition, with the majority of examples being new or virtually unworn. All are serviced on a regular basis by a highly experienced watch maker whose working life is dedicated to maintaining the collection which, having been patiently gathered and never previously revealed, could fairly be described as one of the watch world's 'best kept secrets'.

The OAK Collection exhibition, which has been curated by a hand-picked team of watch world elites, will first be unveiled in London on May 19 before embarking on a global tour incorporating four international stops at spectacular exhibition venues in the USA, Middle East and Asia.

THE COLLECTOR

The individual who has amassed the remarkable OAK Collection (which comprises more than 500 pieces in total) declines to be named, but is happy to share the story of why and how he came to covet, and eventually own, many of the finest watches in the world.

"As a young boy at boarding school in Switzerland, I lived among the children of some of the world's wealthiest people - but all I had was a small, weekly pocket money allowance. I didn't feel envy, but I did want to be like these people and their parents. It gave me what I call 'the Count of Monte Cristo syndrome', a determination to achieve a level of success that would give me freedom to do the things I loved."

The collector achieved his goal as an entrepreneur by exploiting a natural flair for commerce that enabled him to acquire companies that he believed had the capacity to realise far greater potential if their existing business models were intelligently improved upon. Almost invariably his methods were successful, and he eventually attained the freedom he had dreamed of as a schoolboy.

"As soon as I achieved a moderate level of success, I began to buy watches at prices I could afford," he explains. "Gradually, that amount increased and, little by little, the watches became better and the passion for collecting them became stronger. Perhaps strangely, I never thought of the financial aspect or that values might rise - but, thankfully, I seem to have bought the right ones at the right time," he explains.

Over the decades the collector has built up a small, tight-knit network of experts who he has come to know and trust and who are now the only people through whom he acquires additions to the OAK Collection.

In the early stages of creating it, however, he would seek-out rarities everywhere he went. "As I travelled the world on business, I would always look for watches - but it was at a flea market in France 35 years ago that I think I acquired my greatest bargain. It was a steel Patek Philippe Reference 130 Sector, and when I saw it, I began to shake.

"I see being able to send the OAK Collection exhibition around the world both as a reward to myself for building it and as a unique opportunity to share it with the many people who are just as passionate about watches as I am, but have not been as fortunate as me in having the time and the means to acquire so many special pieces. I really do see owning them as an honour and, with that, comes an obligation to let others enjoy them."

THE FATHER-SON CONNECTION

Although the collector has long wanted to show his watches to other enthusiasts, it was his son who originally suggested doing so by means of a global exhibition having spent a lifetime observing his father's undying passion for horology.

"I have not been involved in acquiring watches for the collection, but I have been on the margins of it for as long as I can remember," he explains.

"It has taught me that true collectors are a rare breed who simply never lose interest in the subject they love, but only want to learn more about it. There have been many occasions when I have found my father, very late at night or in the early hours of the morning, poring over watch books either alone at his desk or lying in bed, with dozens of reference works spread out around him.

"As a boy, for example, I quickly grew to understand that when he suggested we looked at a few watches on a Saturday afternoon, it would be a case of spending five hours at his side hearing about every detail and every nuance.

"And as for shopping for watches with him - that was always a painfully embarrassing experience for me, because he would ask endless questions to ensure that whatever he was considering buying met with his exceptional standards. Nothing must have been tampered with, cases must not be polished, dials must not have been retouched. Originality is key and the overall condition must only be pristine. These have always been the golden rules."

THE EXHIBITION FORMAT

Visitors to the OAK Collection exhibition will be taking part in a 'world first' event, because never before has a privately-owned collection of such exceptional watches, all in impeccable condition, been made available to the public.

It is also unlikely that such a comprehensive and carefully curated collection encompassing the best of the best of both vintage and modern watches will ever be compiled within the lifetime of current generations.

As a result, the exhibition will undoubtedly set a new benchmark for quality, rarity and scholarship in the field of watch collecting.

The OAK Collection will be displayed within a series of bespoke-designed, interconnected rooms that will be recreated at each location and will take the viewer on a tranquil horological journey comprising 11 sections, each of which could be described as a 'chapter' of time that encapsulates the collector's appreciation of specific genres of watch, from simple, three-hand models to high complication pieces.

The maker most strongly represented in the exhibition is Patek Philippe, with many examples owned by the collector having been made specifically for him in close, creative collaborations with the manufacture - a process available only to a small number of the firm's most respected clients.

Vintage Patek Philippe models, meanwhile, include references once owned by noted individuals including the musician Eric Clapton and the actor Jean-Paul Belmondo, as well as pieces that were developed for particular uses or which display the maker's mastery of rare hand crafts such as enamelling and engraving.

Also remarkable is the OAK Collection's extraordinary holding of Patek Philippe watches that once belonged to the legendary patron Henry Graves Jnr, the late banker and railroad tycoon who, between 1922 and 1951, commissioned no fewer than 39 watches from the revered maker. Of those, only around 30 are believed to have survived, five of which form part of the OAK Collection. The only larger selection of Graves watches belonging to a single entity is that on show at the Patek Philippe museum, which holds 13.

The Patek Philippe models in the OAK Collection account for six of the exhibition's 11 sections, covering Calatrava, Nautilus, World Time and perpetual calendar/ complication models in addition to the aforementioned Graves and rare handcraft pieces.

But while the collector focuses strongly on the work of Patek Philippe, he does not do so exclusively. As a Rolex connoisseur, he has allocated three significant sections of the exhibition to its pieces, and has also dedicated an area to watches made by the 'new age' independents, notably Francois-Paul Journe and Kari Voutilainen.

The collector's commitment to modern makers is further demonstrated in the fact that, during the eight editions of the biennial Only Watch charity auction, he has been the most prolific buyer, accruing no fewer than 10 unique pieces with dial names as diverse as Kari Voutilainen, H.Moser, and Chanel.

THE SECTIONS

THE PATEK PHILIPPE CALATRAVA SECTION

Although the Calatrava family represents the artistry of Patek Philippe in its simplest form, it has long held a special fascination for the collector. As a result, he has accumulated the largest number of examples in private hands, several of which are unique vintage survivors or modern pieces made specifically for him.

Named after the image used on the marching banners of the 12th century Calatrava knights, the Calatrava Cross has also been Patek Philippe's registered trademark since 1887 - a fact that highlights the importance of its namesake model.

Among the 20 Calatras on display, there will be 12 vintage pieces, four modern ones and three that are one-offs.

Particular stars include: the unique Reference 530A in steel with a black dial; the only known Reference 570J, an unusually large, gold-cased Calatrava with a black dial and indirect centre seconds; and the Reference 570R in pink gold with matching, two-tone rose dial and indirect centre seconds. Add to that the unique Reference 1504 in steel with black dial and pink gold indexes, and you have what the collector calls 'The 'Fantastic Four' - all truly 'One-of-A-Kind' and all with Breguet numerals.

THE PATEK PHILIPPE CHRONOGRAPH SECTION

The chronograph complication has held a particular fascination for the collector for decades. As a result, the OAK Collection exhibition will feature no fewer than 29 examples, all but six of which are rarest-of-the-rare vintage pieces.

Among these is a unique Reference 130J featuring a yellow gold case, a single-pusher mechanism and a remarkable, two-tone mirror dial in silver marked with a tachymeter scale.

Also exceptional are the 1956 Reference 530R pink gold chronograph double-signed with the name of its original retailer, Gobbi Milano, and the Reference 1436 in yellow gold which combines a split-seconds movement with a medical 'pulsometer' scale.

THE GRAVES-FULLERTON PATEK PHILIPPE SECTION

The great Henry Graves Junior's fascination with Patek Philippe watches was passed-down to his grandson, Reginald H. Fullerton, who amassed an exceptional collection of his own.

One of the many unique elements of the OAK Collection exhibition is that it brings together

watches owned by both men - five that belonged to Graves and two owned by Fullerton.

Among the former is the truly astonishing 'observatory quality', platinum-cased tourbillon pocket watch that was created by Patek Philippe to take part in the Geneva Astronomical Observatory Timing Contest of 1933 - which it won outright, making it one of the world's most accurate mechanical watches. It will be displayed with its original case and 'bulletin d'observatoire' timekeeping certificate.

Other blue-chip Graves watches include a gold minute repeater that was especially made for him and which he gifted to his grandson on the occasion of his marriage, and a gold, hunting-cased minute repeater with enamel dial. Three of the Graves watches are engraved with his family crest and celebrated motto 'Esse Quam Videre' - to be, rather than to seem.

The two Fullerton watches, meanwhile, comprise a round, officer-cased wrist watch and a cushion-cased, jump hour model, both of which were produced in limited editions to mark Patek Philippe's 150th anniversary in 1989.

THE PATEK PHILIPPE NAUTILUS SECTION

Designed by the late, great Gerald Genta and launched in 1976, the Patek Philippe Nautilus was one of the first luxury sports watches to be made from steel.

In recent years, it has come to be more widely recognised as one of the most important of all late-20th century Patek Philippe designs - but the collector realised the significance of the Nautilus long ago, as a result of which the exhibition will include no fewer than 16 examples.

They include three early, Reference 3700 models in different formats, the only known Nautilus to have been fitted with a 'special request' quartz movement and a selection of more recent models featuring chronograph and calendar complications.

THE PATEK PHILIPPE PERPETUAL CALENDAR / COMPLICATIONS SECTION

Patek Philippe's perpetual calendar and high complication watches are among the firm's rarest and most difficult to obtain products - so the fact that such pieces make up one of the largest and most comprehensive sections in the OAK Collection exhibition demonstrates just how special it is.

Among six vintage, perpetual calendar chronographs, visitors will see the unique Reference 1518R 'pink on pink' with pink gold case and pink dial; another reference 1518 that was one of just six made with large, Arabic numerals and the unique, first series Reference 2499J with 'champagne' dial.

Modern watches in the section, meanwhile, include a spectacular Reference 3970/2J made as a one-off commission in 2019 with a yellow gold case, matching bracelet and champagne dial. Unworn and in 'new, old stock' condition, it is complemented by a similarly remarkable reference 3970ER from 2015 which combines a pink gold case with a rose dial set with diamond indexes.

THE PATEK PHILIPPE RARE HANDCRAFTS SECTION

Patek Philippe's mastery of the art of horology extends to the unique and exquisite decoration of its watches through the use of engraving, enamelling, guilloche and even marquetry.

The collector's appreciation of these enhancements, which serve to add to the unique nature of a particular watch, has moved him to acquire many examples featuring rare handcrafts. Nine such watches are included in the exhibition.

One is a very rare Reference 5089G pocket watch dating from 2017 which has an enamelled guilloche dial carrying individually applied hour markers in the form of tiny flowers made from yellow gold.

Also exceptional is a hunting-cased Calatrava wrist watch made to mark Patek Philippe's 175th anniversary that features a marquetry dial depicting a traditional sailing barque on Lac Lemane.

Other, very special enamelled pieces, meanwhile, include pocket watches, wrist watches and a unique, gilt-brass dome clock decorated with images of hot air balloons in flight.

THE PATEK PHILIPPE WORLD TIME SECTION

The Patek Philippe 'World Time' wristwatches first developed in collaboration with genius horologist Louis Cottier during the 1930s always appeal to high-end collectors - but they become additionally covetable when they benefit from rare dial variants, such as one of the two vintage 'Heures Universelles' models featured in the exhibition.

The Reference 2523J two-crown World Time is one of just four known examples to feature a dial centre enamelled in polychrome blue - the collector's favourite colour.

The other vintage piece is a pristine, 1963 example of the exceptionally beautiful Reference 2523, while modern World Time pieces include no fewer than four with dials decorated with polychrome enamel maps.

THE NEW AGE INDEPENDENTS & STEEL SPORTS SECTION

The collector's wide-ranging appreciation of horological excellence has led him to embrace the

world of the contemporary makers who, within the past two decades, have established themselves as modern masters of their craft.

Chief among these are the French watch maker Francois-Paul Journe and the Fin Kari Voutilainen, both of whom have supplied the collector with some of their most exceptional pieces.

The OAK Collection exhibition will give visitors the rare chance to see François-Paul Journe's famous 'Ruthenium set' which comprises a Chronometre a Resonance, an Octa Calendrier, a Tourbillon Souverain, an Octa Chronograph and an Octa Auto.

All date from 2002, a time when the maker's excellence was only just coming to recognition, and all have movements made from ruthenium-plated brass - making them extremely rare and hugely collectable. Even more remarkably, each watch is in new, old stock condition.

The Voutilainen pieces, meanwhile, comprise five examples, all in equally pristine condition. One is a unique piece acquired by the collector having been donated by Voutilainen to the sixth edition of the Only watch charity auction held in 2015 to raise funds for research into Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

Featuring a unique escapement, it was the first of the maker's GMT models to be cased in steel.

THE ROLEX GMT-MASTER SECTION

Rolex famously made its GMT-Master time zone watch at the request of Pan-American airlines during preparations for the first passenger-carrying, intercontinental jet aircraft flights by Boeing 707.

Before putting the 707 into full service, Pan-Am asked Rolex to develop a wristwatch that would enable its wearer to tell the time at a glance in both the 'home' and 'destination' zones - the result being the Reference 6542 GMT-Master with a rotatable bezel calibrated into 24 hours and designed to be used in conjunction with a fourth hand - the 24-hour hand,. The model was nicknamed the 'Pussy Galore' as a result of being worn by Honor Blackman's aircraft-flying character in the 1964 James Bond movie 'Goldfinger'.

The bezel was made from steel with a Plexiglass insert, one half of which was coloured blue to represent night and the other half red to represent day. It was a simple matter to set the 24-hour hand so that it showed the time at destination time on the bezel, leaving the main hour hand on 'home' time.

The GMT-Master has become one of the most collectable of all Rolex sports watches - and the

OAK Collection exhibition will include no fewer than 11 pristine examples ranging from an early version with Bakelite bezel to highly desirable variations such as the so called 'Chuck Yeager'. Regardless of age, however, each one is in pristine, virtually unworn condition.

THE ROLEX SPORTS CHRONOGRAPH SECTION

Sports chronographs by Rolex are among the most popular and sought after high quality watches ever made. The OAK Collection celebrates their ongoing development and horological significance with a display of 13 examples, eight of which are vintage pieces and five of which are modern.

Among the former, particular highlights include an exceptionally rare 1961 Cosmograph issued to the Fuerza Aerea del Peru, Peru's combined military and naval group, and a 1966 Cosmograph Daytona which not only features a sought-after 'Paul Newman' dial but is made additionally collectable by the fact that it was originally owned by NASA astronaut Walter Cunningham who piloted the Apollo 7 lunar module.

More modern examples range from a yellow gold Cosmograph Daytona powered by the Rolex-modified version of the famous Zenith El Primero automatic movement, to what is almost certainly the best existing example of the original platinum-cased Daytona launched in 2013.

Indeed, it is believed to be the first example of the model ever to have been sold and was acquired by the collector after being consigned to auction to raise funds for charity. It remains in pristine, unworn condition.

THE ROLEX SPORTS WATCH SECTION

This nine-watch selection represents several of the most coveted Rolex sports models made by the firm since the landmark 'Explorer' was launched during the 1950s.

By their very nature, Rolex sports watches are notoriously difficult to find in excellent condition, let alone in the pristine, virtually unused form in which they appear in the OAK Collection.

All key vintage models are represented, from the early Explorer to a 1980s Explorer-II (known as the 'Steve McQueen') and from a perfect, 1969 Submariner with ultra-desirable red script and 'tropical' bezel to a 1972 version originally supplied to the COMEX underwater engineering firm.



THE OAK COLLECTION - 10 QUICK FACTS

The oldest watch :

The Henry Graves Jr gold, slim, hunter case, minute repeating dress watch. Made in 1927.

With an unique provenance and in mint condition, the present watch is probably one of the best simple minute repeating Patek Philippe watches known to have survived.

The newest watch:

The Nautilus 5711/1A-014 - the already celebrated green dial version of the Nautilus that was launched in 2021.

The largest watch:

The largest watch is the Henry Graves tourbillon pocket watch, measuring 48mm in diameter.

The largest wrist watches are those in the Nautilus section.

The smallest watch:

The smallest watch is the platinum Calatrava Reference 96 which has a diameter of just 30.5mm

The most complicated watch :

The most complicated watch in the collection is the modern Reference 5208 - it features a minute repeater, perpetual calendar and chronograph indications.

The only watch with a quartz movement:

The one watch in the collection with a quartz movement is the vintage Nautilus Reference 3800 - the only quartz-powered example of the reference in existence, made upon special request by a doctor to Patek Philippe.

The collector's' favourite:

Not one watch, but four. All from the vintage Calatrava section and comprising two steel, one yellow gold and one pink gold Calatrava, all with Breguet numerals.

The earliest buy:

A Cartier tank, bought with the winnings from a horseracing bet.

The jewels of the collection:

The remarkable selection of Graves/ Fullerton watches - the greatest private holding in the world outside of the Patek Philippe museum collection.

**** The OAK Collection travelling exhibition opens at the Design Museum, 224-238 Kensington High St, London W8 6AG on May 19 (May 18 for the press) and runs until May 25. It will then move to the Bahrain National Museum, Shaikh Hamad Causeway, Manama, China and the USA in 2022.*

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