

JEWELRY

## Artisans apply new technologies to old world timepieces at Watches and Wonders 2023

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*Luxury names are reinterpreting their art, presenting innovations that contradict old views of timekeeping. Image credit: Montblanc*

By EMILY IRIS DEGN

Heritage watchmaking brands are turning horology on its head, presenting reinterpretations of timekeeping traditions at Watches and Wonders 2023 in Geneva.

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From changing the direction of the hands to rethinking the function of the wristwatch itself, old-world names are venturing into unknown territory in mass. At times breaking down the very concept of time itself, the new approach to watchmaking is being presented at the global programming through installations, panels and new drops.

Watches and Wonders Geneva is always full of surprises and this year was no exception," said David Hurley, deputy CEO of [The Watches of Switzerland Group](#), New York.

"We saw brands re-imagining the experiences they gave guests in their booths at the show," Mr. Hurley said. "It all shows that while heritage and tradition will always be important, these watch [brands] some... literally centuries old realize they must innovate and at times be surprising and unexpected if they want to capture the attention of today's watch consumer."

A timely shift

Keeping with originality, the historic industry is reimagining the craft of watchmaking itself, taking a fresh look at the wristwatch's timekeeping purpose.

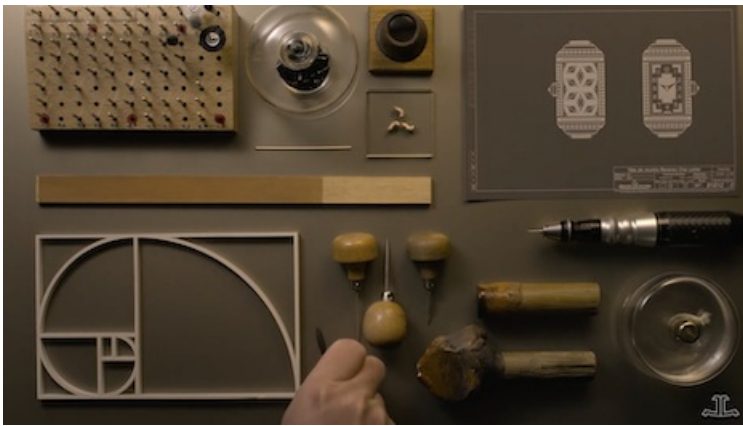
No longer are wristwatches simply for keeping linear time, as wristwatches are not primarily practical tools anymore thanks to most modern consumers using their cell phones to tell the time. Wristwatches are now more of a status symbol; a luxury, with their practical function being a bonus.



*Watchmakers are inventing new ways for their work to be used by consumers. Image credit: Rolex*

With this in mind, various brands are taking a hard look at what their purpose is in the contemporary age, as they are no longer the singular keepers of time with accurate time now being accessible to everyone who has a cellphone, laptop or smart device.

In years past, brands have been addressing this by focusing on preserving heritage, presenting themselves as artisanal windows to the past; masters of fine craftsmanship essentially turning watches from a tool that happens to be beautiful and into a beautiful thing that happens to also act as a tool.



*As the consumer base gets younger and the world modernizes, watchmaking is needing to update its function. Image credit: Jaeger-LeCoultre*

However, if the Watches and Wonders displays and announcements are any indication of current attitudes, this framework is not enough anymore either. Now, old-world watchmakers are reinventing the very craft itself, working to present new perspectives on what a watch even is in the first place ([see story](#)).

Swiss watchmaker Rolex has taken the opportunity to announce that instead of displaying the day or the date to signify time on the Oyster Perpetual Day-Date 36, it displays emotions.

At 12 o'clock instead of a number or concrete way to tell time, there is an aperture that includes seven words to pick an emotion. On the side, where the date would be, there is a window with 31 emojis to pick from.

"Nobody could have predicted Rolex dropping a Day Date with puzzle piece dial and emoji date window," Mr. Hurley said.

"It's sure to be a collector's item."



*As people can tell time on their phone, Rolex is rethinking what can be displayed on the face of its watches. Image credit: Rolex*

As emojis have become the modern way to express feelings and inner thoughts to others, this reinterpretation of a watch is highly relevant. Not only that, but replacing measurements of time with emotions is a powerful way to state to consumers that the brand is reconsidering what time means in the modern world is it solely measured by numbers, or can it be kept track of based on something more abstract such as memories and states of wellbeing?

The move also appeals heavily to Gen Z and millennial consumers, as the majority of emoji users fall into that demographic, acting as an effective way for a heritage brand to appeal to young people.

German luxury goods maker Montblanc also completely reinvented the definition of a watch, meditating on the very idea of time itself, unveiling the limited-edition 1858 The Unveiled Secret Minerva Monopusher Chronograph a wristwatch that tells time backward.

#### *The Craft Behind 1858 The Unveiled Secret Minerva Monopusher Chronograph Limited Edition*

Focusing on the art of timekeeping movements, the brand's upcoming release has been handcrafted to have counter-clockwise hands.

"Montblanc's counterclockwise mechanism is an intriguing example of how old-world watchmakers are reimagining their craft," said Dalia Strum, founder of [ReThink Connect](#) and professor at The Fashion Institute of Technology, New York.

"This innovative approach challenges conventional ideas about how time should be measured, and it sparks conversation and intrigue," Ms. Strum said. "It also speaks to the brand's commitment to creativity and imagination, as they're willing to take risks and explore new ideas to create unique and memorable pieces.

"Furthermore, the counterclockwise mechanism is an exciting exploration of the limits of time, highlighting the idea that time is a construct that we humans have created, and that it can be interpreted and represented in a variety of ways... opening up new possibilities for creative expression and innovation within the world of luxury watchmaking."

This is not the first time that the brand has presented explorations of turning time around ([see story](#)).

#### Impending immersion

The Watches and Wonders 2023 programming was also chocked full of immersive offerings, as historic brands tried out the increasing demand for engaging content, driven by young consumers.

"A. Lange & Shne brought their new Odysseus Chronograph to life with a giant 3-D version, while Ulysse Nardin created an immersive, interactive installation of its 'Freak' movement," Mr. Hurley said.

"There were constant crowds watching JLC's holographic fountain presentation, highlighting their Reverso collection," he said. "All of these moments were made for Instagram sharing."

#### *"Step into a new multisensory experience to discover the Jaeger-LeCoultre Golden Ratio booth."*

Swiss watchmaker IWC Schaffhausen also brought the age-old watchmaker's loupe into the 21st century, making it digital. This allows for streaming and engaging craftsmanship, all while reinterpreting who the loupe is for.

"Immersion has always been important to watchmakers and part of why they have been so reluctant (and frankly behind) when it comes to digital commerce," said Donnie Pacheco, CEO of Donnie P. Consulting, Seattle.

"Watchmakers have always believed in the importance of limited distribution that promotes a tactile-first experience, wanting customers to be able to look, touch, and see the timepieces in person partly to have a customer see the craftsmanship in person, but mainly to allow a salesperson to provide additional information about the brand, timepiece, quality, and movements," Mr. Pacheco said. "Initially, these brands shunned online because they could not recreate this controlled environment online.

"As digital commerce has evolved, things like AI and 3D are allowing brands to better showcase their brands and products in a way they deem appropriate (i.e., more like the old way of selling)."