



**FUTURE
TIMES**

The Horological Machine No. 4 Thunderbolt from MB&F has a case made of titanium and sapphire crystal and is powered by a manual winding movement. Production is limited to 25-35 pieces a year

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PRIVATDESIGN

Keith W Strandberg *surveys limited edition and unique timepieces to find out what the discriminating aficionado is wearing*

Strictly limited

Are you sick of seeing the same suits, shoes and accessories in every city you visit? Globalisation may be good for business, but it's not great if you are looking for your own style. There is one place, however, where you can find a little uniqueness – Switzerland. Its devoted watchmakers love nothing more than creating a special limited edition or bespoke timepiece.

More and more luxury watch companies are making it possible for customers to have unique timepieces. Customers can choose alterations and modifications to existing collection watches. It takes longer and costs more, but for many customers it's worth the wait and extra money.

Vacheron Constantin has taken this further, establishing an entire department, the Cabinotiers workshop, devoted to highly limited and bespoke products. Here, you can create your own timepiece from scratch, including a movement that can be made especially for you. The price is steep, but it is worth every penny to have a one-off movement and timepiece.

Jean Dunand is a Swiss company that makes only unique timepieces, using special materials like natural stones and precious metals, and the brand will even make watches specific to a client's demands, as long as they fit into the brand's design ethic.

Companies like Audemars Piguet, Cartier and Bovet are happy to satisfy their clients' wishes, with made-to-order miniature paintings on the dial, engravings on the rotor or other parts of the movement, creating a special engraving on the caseback and changing the standard colours.

If you don't have the time or inclination to design your own watch, you can opt for a limited edition. The leading brands go out of their way to make their limited editions special, using prized materials, out of the ordinary artistic operations and designs that are meant for people who desire something a little bit different.

Some companies, like Patek Philippe, Van Cleef & Arpels, DeLaneau and Piaget, do miniature painting, enamel, lacquer, engraving, mother of pearl inlay and more

HEIGHT OF FASHION

RIGHT: the MB I from Bremont is only available for purchase by people who have ejected from a Martin Baker aviation ejector seat. The MB II uses the same technology, developed to withstand ejection, and is available to the public

FAR RIGHT: the Rotonde de Cartier Grand Comp Skeleton is a grand complication that features a tourbillon (the mechanism visible at 9 o'clock), a perpetual calendar and a chronograph, all skeletonised



in their limited edition watches. These are artisanal processes that are so time-consuming and prohibitively expensive that it would be impossible to incorporate them into their regular collections.

Many companies use limited editions to 'stretch their muscles' in watchmaking, pushing the envelope of their abilities, knowing that only a select few of these special watches can be made for a discerning clientele. Franc Vila, for example, uses complicated movements, high-tech materials and forward-thinking designs to stand out from the crowd.

Other companies make such highly technical and complicated timepieces that they can only produce a very limited number of them a year. Greubel-Forsey, for example, makes only tourbillons, double inclined tourbillons and quadruple tourbillons, some of the most complicated and difficult-to-produce timepieces in the world.

Just about every quality watch brand does a limited edition – the key is to determine what makes each limited edition special and assess its true value. Recently, there have been some timepieces with really interesting hooks like the Black Belt Watch, which only black belts in the martial arts can buy; the Bremont Martin Baker limited

edition timepiece is for people who have ejected out of an aeroplane in a Martin Baker ejector seat, while the Jaeger-LeCoultre watch locks and unlocks your Aston Martin DBS, requiring you to buy the DBS first.

These unique qualities help these watches stand out and also enhance their cachet, making them even more desirable. Then there are the out-there watches, like the MB&F timepieces that look more like spaceships, or the Urwerk and Hautlence watches that redefine how we read the time.

There is no danger that watch companies will stop producing these fantastic creations while customers clamour for the unique. It is worth noting that bespoke and limited editions continue to do well on the auction market. For instance, one of the most famous custom timepieces is the Patek Philippe Graves pocket watch, which was made in 1933 and sold for \$11m at auction in 1999.

Uniqueness will be valued ever more highly as the ranks of watch lovers grow: after all, discerning customers don't want to wear the same watches as everyone else. True luxury today may just be having something that no one else has, but everyone else values.

WHITE GUARD

BOTTOM: the Hautlence HLc is the first round watch for the brand, which has made a splash with its unique ways of displaying time. Here, the hour is visible in the left circle, while the minute is indicated by the hand to the right. Limited to 88 pieces for the world, the HLc can also be customised for each individual client

BOTTOM LEFT: Christophe Claret made his name producing high complications for famous brands. Now, for the first time, he has introduced his own timepiece, the highly complicated DualTow. The watch has 574 individual parts and the watch is a planetary-gear chronograph with a striking mechanism that sounds when the chronograph is activated, stopped or reset. The DualTow is limited to 68 pieces, with each one unique; buyers configure their own watches

BLACK WATCH

LEFT: the Black Belt Watch is the only watch you have to earn – you must prove you are a certified black belt before you can buy it. Designed by martial artist Yvan Arpa, the man responsible for the Romain Jerome Titanic watch and the Hublot Big Bang, and himself a black belt

FAR LEFT: limited to 1,000 pieces, the Audemars Piguet Royal Oak Offshore Survivor is a chronograph made of black titanium, built to cope with just about anything. Its strongbox case is water-resistant to 100 metres and is antimagnetic and shock-resistant. Perfect for the next time you're marooned in shark-infested waters with just a large magnet to cling to

