



According to Forbes, men are moving away from the chunky time machines of recent years and gravitating toward vintage-inspired watches with an air of timeless elegance. And, luckily, both SIHH and Baselworld had a plethora of pieces this year to fulfill the brief at under £2,000. **Robin Swithinbank**

Simple Modern Classic

I've always had a peculiar desire to travel back into the past armed with the cleverest toys and gadgets we make today, purely to wow the yokels of yesteryear with the brilliance of modern advances. Just imagine the reaction you'd get if you rocked up, back in 1951, at The Festival of Britain at the wheel of a McLaren MP4-26, whipped out your iPad 2 and started flicking through a freshly downloaded edition of *The Times*.

By contrast, there's every chance the one device that wouldn't astonish the visionaries of the mid-20th century would be your wristwatch. That's not to say watch technology hasn't advanced, nor that there aren't some mind-bending watches being made today – that would be nonsense – but aesthetically, 2011's watch collections bear a lot of the same traits as those produced 60 years ago.

Vintage-inspired watch design was championed by brand after brand at Baselworld this year. Set against the relentless sound of progress and the advent of scarily named conditions like cognitive overload, the fashion for vintage is a welcome acknowledgement that not everything we did way-back-when was tinged with naivety. So whether it was Ebel marking their centenary year with the Classic 100 (at a comely £1,590, incidentally), Frédérique Constant launching the Vintage Racing collection, Omega recalling the original Seamaster with a beautiful piece commemorating the 1948 London Olympics, or Breitling updating their 1958 Transocean, vintage-inspired timepieces were everywhere.

Because these are based on original designs embellished with little more than three hands and the odd date function, the price points on the majority of the contemporary crop are tantalisingly accessible. Here are three of the best vintage-inspired watches under £2K around.



Oris Big Crown Hunter Team PS

It's hard to think of vintage wristwatches without thinking of those models originally designed with pilots in mind. Pilots' watches have been fashionable for years – evidence the vintage trend has been bubbling away under the surface for some time. The genesis of the wristwatch owes a lot to wingmen of the first half of the 20th century who wore watches tailored to tackle the problem of quickly referencing the time while airborne. One of the features of these watches was a big crown, designed for ease-of-use while gloved, which has been picked up on by Oris' Big Crown Hunter Team PS Edition.

The watch is a pleasingly simple, with a 44mm or 38mm stainless steel case, fluted bezel and dark brown calfskin leather strap. The dial bears large numerals at 12, 3, 6 and 9, large white Superluminova hands for legibility and is covered by a vintage-inspired domed glass with anti-reflective coating on the inner. It's an automatic, fuelled by the Oris Calibre 733 (a modified version of Sellita's Calibre SW200).

The name comes from the Swiss Air Force's 'Patrouille Suisse' Hunter planes, which were withdrawn in 1994. Oris is part of a campaign to save these jets and a proportion of the £980 price tag will go to supporting it (for the 44mm strap version; £1,050 on a bracelet).

Further information: www.oris.ch

Each Swiss Hunter Team PS Edition features the Oris big crown, which is easy to operate when wearing aviation gloves, the Swiss Cross on the seconds hand and the logo of the Swiss Hunter Team on the caseback.



TAG Heuer Carrera Heritage

The vintage look carries a little more cred when done by a brand that was around when the design cues were avant-garde. TAG Heuer, or Heuer as it was until the 1985 buy-out by Techniques d'Avant Garde, has been producing timepieces since 1861, so knows a thing or two about past watch design. And it has introduced this into the new Carrera Heritage – an extension to TAG Heuer's best-selling line, itself a product of the 1960s.

The Heritage is powered by the automatic Calibre 6 movement, which is based on ETA's 2895-1, providing a small seconds and a date aperture. Being a TAG Heuer, it's available in umpteen different guises, but by far the most striking of these is the model with blue hands and numerals on a blue alligator strap. The stainless steel case is deliberately narrower at 39mm, while the elegant silver *flinquéd* dial cuts a very vintage dash.

TAG Heuer has high commercial expectations of the Heritage collection, which is also available as a chronograph using the Calibre 16 movement, and it's not hard to see why. Although it will be overshadowed in the press by stories of the 1/1000th of a second Mikrograph concept watch also shown in Basel this year (definitely one to take back to 1951, come to think of it), it's a fine watch at £1,700.

Further information: www.tagheuer.com

The 39mm Carrera Heritage reinterprets one of motor racing's most iconic timepieces. It is equipped with an automatic Calibre 6 movement with an *azurage* embossed small second counter and the date at 6 o'clock.



Ebel Classic 100

If you've followed the recent fortunes of Ebel you might be surprised to find the company on these pages. The UK market has turned its nose up at recent offerings from a brand, which is this year celebrating 100 years in the watchmaking business, but if the stunning centenary Ebel Classic 100 is anything to go by, that could change.

Among its muted, elegant features is the use of the original antique Ebel logo. As a sign of these more conservative times, it actually looks more contemporary than the usual Ebel logo, which could do with an update as part of a fresh approach to the collection (a suggestion that received an unconvincing response on the stand in Basel, I should add).

It sits on a silver-toned, sunburst dial decorated by classic, elongated hour markers punctuated only by a date aperture. The diamond-polished, leaf-shaped hands rest quietly behind a stylish blued sweep seconds hand. The case bridges the gap between vintage and modern, coming in at 40mm wide and 9.1mm deep, and the movement is the automatic EBEL 120 (with a gentle nod to ETA). It's a great looking watch – the only hope is that retailers in this country pick it up and give us all a chance to get our hands on it. Properly priced at £1,590.

Further information: www.ebel.com

Celebrating its 100th anniversary is reason enough for Ebel to launch the Ebel Classic 100 with 40mm silver dial featuring the original Ebel logo design. The watch is naturally limited to 1911 pieces worldwide.