

S I M P L E M O D E R N C L A S S I C



If you saw a recent report on how we tell the time today, you will have read that only 86 per cent of us now wear a wristwatch. The rest think a watch is a superfluous anachronism - mobile phones and computers do a much better job. This percentage is on the up, the report suggested, meaning wristwatches may soon be the preserve of the few, along with a degree from a British university.

Robin Swithinbank



Time indicated on a computer screen bears no comparison to a hand-crafted timepiece

Underneath the depressing headline is the fact that the 86 per cent actually doubles in the 15-24 age bracket. Jonny Teenager, with his tender touch-screen tryst, neither wears nor understands a watch. Will the wristwatch die? In our lifetimes, no. You see, despite what some early adopters say, old-school wristwatches still serve a purpose. And often, the old way of doing things works just as well as the new. Compare the role of the pen. Today, if I want to make a note of something, any of those same electronic devices will record it for me. But I still have a pot of pens on my desk. Sometimes, only a pen will do, even though, arguably, it's obsolete.

A watch, positioned conveniently on the wrist, is the same. The technology may be outmoded, but the simple act of reading the time from a device strapped across your ulna is hard to beat for

practicality. And what of romance? Naturally, Jonny Teenager has no feel for the finer things in life. And that's fine. Obsession with single malts, fine tailoring and mechanical watch movements is - quite rightly - reserved for the mature, for whom the time indicated on a computer screen bears absolutely no comparison to the delicate inner workings of a hand-crafted timepiece, nor to the gentle, seamless parade of a second hand around a watch dial.

All of which brings me to dress watches and the maturing watch buyer. Once the taste buds have been saturated by Japanese quartz and the initial thrill of cheap mechanicals, it's time to look to Switzerland and to invest in a timeless timepiece - a special occasion watch that will become the basis of a collection. The market is rich in such watches, given their significance to the watch buyer. Picking just one is tricky - here we have the benefit of looking at three.

Sinn 6100 Classic 4N Regulateur

Sinn is a German brand with genuine ties to the world of aviation and did, in fact, at one time produce Bell & Ross watches (the relationship ended in 2002). Helmut Sinn, who founded the company in 1961, was a pilot and flight instructor and the company's collection is flush with Teutonic aeronautical instruments that feature exclusive and impressive in-house developed technologies.

Sinn is less well known for producing dress watches but, as is common to the brand, when they do, the results are not just technically sound, they are also extremely pleasing to the eye. The new Sinn 6100 Classic 4N Regulateur is a case in point. Putting aside the slightly chemical sounding name for a moment, on first glance, it's clearly a timepiece that would look comfortable in the presence of royalty, dignitaries and great-granny on her 100th birthday.

The spec list looks like a collaborative effort between a French poet and a German industrialist; a guilloché dial and gold painted appliques sit alongside a Triois precision adjustment system (for accuracy). But of course what stands out most about the stainless steel 6100 Classic is that it is a regulator - the minute and hour hands are non Co-axial. That's to say, the dial is dominated by a large minute hand, while the hour hand is placed on a separate subdial, here at 12 o'clock. In keeping with the function, hour markers are replaced by minutes.

The manually wound UNITAS 6498-1 movement is visible through a sapphire caseback - a nice touch that demonstrates Sinn's passion for watchmaking. It's a classy piece, and yet for all that regulator watches can inflict serious damage on your retirement fund, Sinn only asks £1,450 in return for it.



The Sinn 6100 Classic 4N Regulateur in stainless steel is manual wind and features a 10.6mm case, guilloché dial, gold painted counters and appliques, sapphire crystal caseback and leather strap.

Bell & Ross Vintage BR 123 Original



The Bell & Ross Vintage BR 123 Original launched at the last Baselworld fair and is the sister piece to Bell & Ross' Vintage Heritage, a black PVD-coated number on a tan strap that's been featured in almost every watch publication under the sun since its spring release. The Heritage is a heavily stylised piece - all well and good, but not a true dress piece.

The Original, by contrast, has a satin-finish, stainless steel case and either a black or beige dial that sits beneath a vintage-style domed sapphire. On a calfskin leather strap, it's ageless, fitting of a gentleman of any generation and, judging by the interest of visitors to the Bell & Ross stand at the recent SalonQP, it looks none too shabby on a lady either.

The automatic Bell & Ross Vintage BR 123 Original features a steel case, beige or black dial, small seconds, date and a leather strap.

Beneath its unassuming skin beats the similarly unfussy ETA 2895 automatic movement, which supplies the watch with a small seconds and date. These overlap elegantly at 6 o'clock. In the flesh, its simplicity is curiously distracting. The perfect symmetry of the design is sharpened by the angular lines of the lugs, making the watch feel both vintage and modern at the same time, as if RJ Mitchell was back from the grave and now designing timepieces, instead of Supermarine Spitfires.

Bell & Ross is understandably keen to inform the world that the Vintage BR 123 Original retails for just £1,500 - a couple of hundred less than the Heritage, and a lot of brand for your money.

Perrelet First Class

Arguably the most sartorially styled of the trio is Perrelet's First Class, a stunning watch from a brand beginning to make a name for itself, despite a history that reaches back to the 1700s - watchmaking's most romantic period.

Perrelet's credentials owe much to founding father Abraham-Louis Perrelet, who paved the way for all modern automatics with the invention of the automatic winding system in 1777. His grandson Louis-Frédéric invented an astronomical clock in 1815 and became watchmaker to three kings of France. Not a bad heritage. The modern chapter of the brand's history starts in earnest in 2004, when it was bought by the Festina Group's Miguel Rodriguez. It's now based in Biel/Bienne in Switzerland's most fertile watchmaking region.

The First Class, part of the Classic collection, is available in six guises, all based on a fluted stainless steel case - fluting being a brand hallmark. My standout choice among these models is the black-dialed version with those modernist, elongated hour markers. What is so beguiling about this piece is that it sets its wearer apart from others who opt for one of the market's safe, identikit watches lapped up by chunky-tied middle management.

The design is crisp, confident and almost non-conformist, despite being a really quite straightforward piece. On paper, it's just another automatic, three-hand watch with a date aperture - but how many estate agents have you seen wearing one? It's yours for just £1,500. Keep it to yourself, won't you...

The automatic Perrelet First Class in steel with 10.6mm deep case, black dial, date at 6 o'clock and alligator strap.



Further information: www.sinn.de www.bellross.com www.perrelet.com