

# NEW HORIZONS



The Chiffre Rouge collection re-writes Dior's previous approach to watchmaking. The signature asymmetrical case houses a self-winding movement developed by Zenith and models are available in 36mm (far left), 38mm (see page 34, bottom right) and 42mm (left).



Only six years ago it would have been unthinkable to have a full feature in *QP* on Dior watches. In those days fun fashionable quartz pieces bearing the catwalk colours of the season were the name of the game *chez* Dior. But over the past few years the brand has changed its approach to watchmaking and, more than ever, this year's collection shows a more grown up and up-market approach to the business of timekeeping.

Maria Doulton



The Christal Mystery Tourbillon with tourbillon created by the Concepto watch factory. £120,000.

Gone are the heavily logo'd watches with snap-on and off straps that were as easy to change as a pair of shoes and in their place is a collection that is positioned to be on a par with Dior's *haute couture* – known for creativity and underpinned by technical expertise. Think tourbillons, mystery movements and finely worked dials, all enhanced with the frisson of the creative powerhouse of Dior. The design styles range from art deco to the traditional and quietly quirky. The materials span turquoise to jade, iolite or lacquer. The result is a slightly eccentric but fascinating melee, as one would expect from a couture house.

The first hint of serious change was in the form of the Chiffre Rouge that emerged in 2004. The handsome chronograph powered by an El Primero movement from sister LVMH brand Zenith, was given a Parisian touch by the house's then menswear designer Hedi Slimane who embellished the watch with an asymmetric line running through

the metal bracelet and a smoky dark sapphire glass back. These and other couture-clever details such as a slightly off-centre position of the crown marked a coming together of Dior and quality calibres.

Since then, the Chiffre Rouge range has maintained its basic case shape but evolved to incorporate variations such as this year's not-so-subtle, all-gold 103 limited edition twinkling with details such as the winding crown set with miniature baguette diamonds and four square diamonds on the dial. I love the fact that the chronograph reset button is made of sapphire crystal as is the glass rotor. And, all the while, the Irréductible movement by Zenith is reliably toiling away under the dial.

### Christal tips

Then the Dior Christal line was launched in 2005, created by John Galiano. What most stands out about this watch is the use of sapphire crystal in different shapes and colours set into the bezel, case and



The Mystery Tourbillon movement.



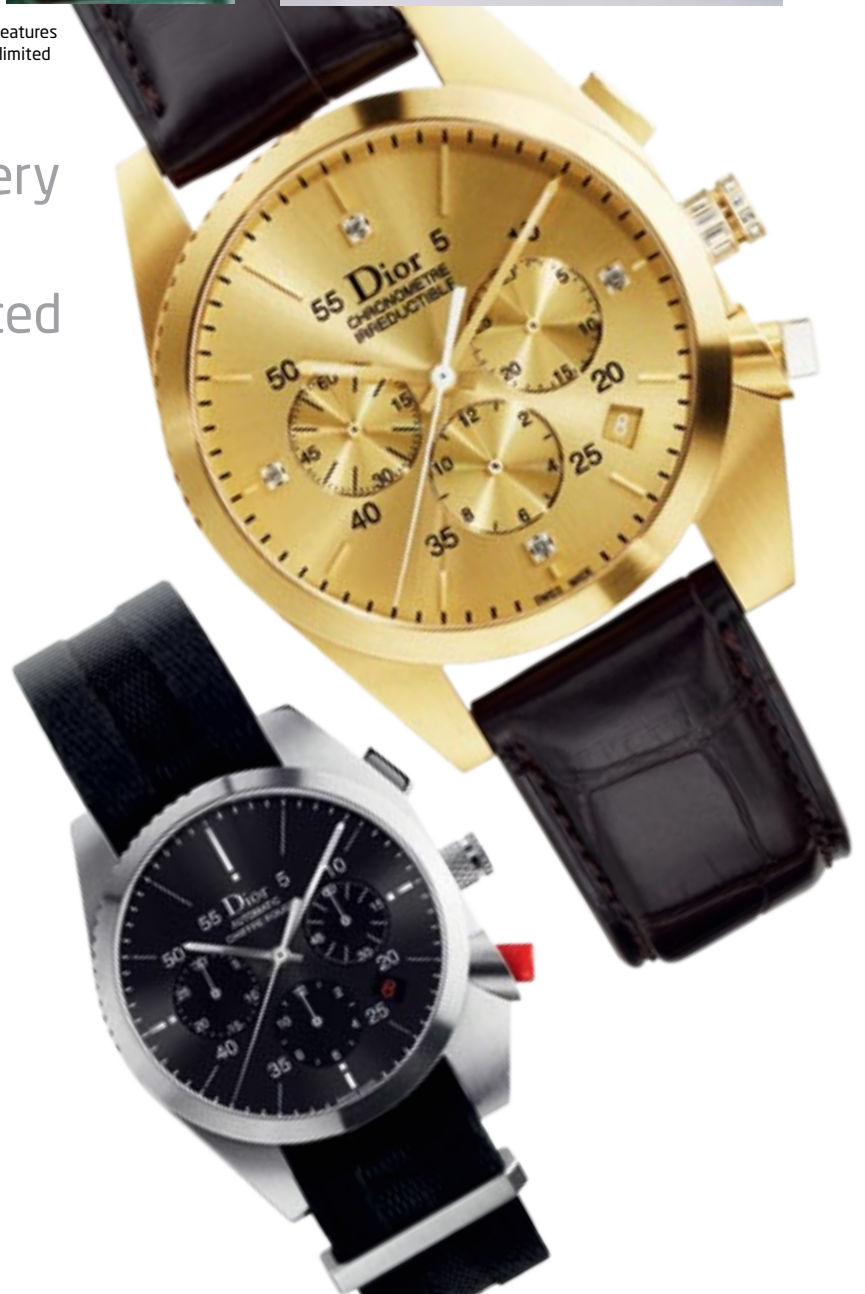


Special editions in the Chiffre Rouge collection include the 103, which features a diamond-set dial and gold oscillating weight, case and bracelet and is limited to only 15 sets. £25,000.

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bracelet, and hence the origin of its name. Though perhaps the most fashion-led of the watches, with its annually changing crystals, the first Dior tourbillon appeared in a Christal in 2008 and automatic movements became the norm in the core collection.

Dior is not the first watch brand to realise that upping the quality and hence the mechanical integrity of its watch collection makes business sense, although it may well be the most dramatic turnaround. But what is it that has got me excited about the new Dior watches? Take the exotic Christal Mystérieuse. Like other mystery watches, plates of sapphire crystal provide the illusion of the hands floating unattached on a diaphanous dial. This in itself is not new, but Dior's take on it is novel.



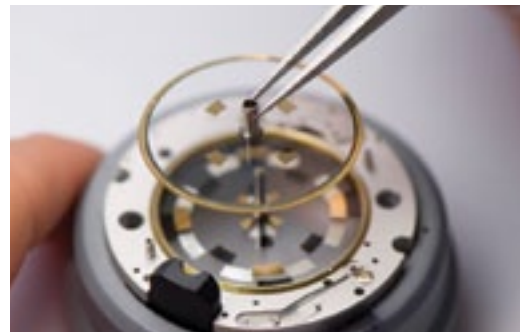


In this version, the six crystal plates stacked up on top of each other are decorated with white and black mother of pearl, diamond and gold geometric inserts. The result is a constantly changing kaleidoscope of shimmering symmetry that adds a completely new appeal to this complication. While the electromechanical movement manufactured for Dior by Quinting is doing its work of keeping the time, the dial becomes a fascinating feature, taking it out of the realms of boy toy, and turning it into an object of beauty and fascination. It is this ability to refresh a very technical object that gets my approval. And fashion is, after all, about re-inventing and re-thinking the mundane.

Similarly the white gold Christal Mystery Tourbillon 42mm manages to surprise with its sinister take on this well known complication. The tinting of the sapphire plates, the cool white gold bridge and glossy black crystal pyramids makes even a hardened watch buff look again. By adding the nuances of couture to a watch, suddenly this archaic mechanical complication is dead cool. If Batman wore a tourbillon, he may well consider the Christal Mystery, but he better hurry as only 15 will be made with the tourbillon provided by the Concepto watch factory in La Chaux-de-Fonds.

### Passages of time

In parallel, the Christal range, has expanded to include the Passages collection, that picks up details from the season's frocks including pleats, drapes, rose patterns and embroidery and transfers them



Top left: Hard to read but beautiful to look at, the 2009, 38mm Christal Mystérieuse is powered by a mystery movement, developed by a team of engineers at the Quinting manufacture. £10,900.

Left: Assembly of the Quinting movement for the Christal Mystérieuse.







The Christal Passages collection picks up details from the season's couture collection in gemstones. £115,000.



into the watch. Take the Passage No. 1: the purple iolite was chosen to match the colours seen on the couture creation while the dial echos the embroidery technique of the jacket and the black lacquer its lapels. Like a handmade piece of clothing, details are carried through to the back of the watch with oscillating weights set with mother of pearl and diamonds.

In comparison, both the Chiffre Rouge and Christall ranges were preceded by the La D de Dior in 2003, a minimalist take on the big round men's flat

watch of the 1970s. Far from being replaced by the newer models, however, the La D has been a constant presence at Dior and is now available with mechanical movements, again created by LVMH stablemate Zenith.

Offering a completely different approach, the La D collection, is the work of jewellery designer Victoire de Castellane who approaches watches as she would a jewellery collection. Just for background, De Castellane who designs Dior's wacky yet highly opulent jewellery (think this year's acid bright colours





The Victoire de Castellane La Mini D Opal with Zenith Elite movement. £8,400.  
Below: Cutting the stone and assembling the La Mini D.

meet Bollywood or bejeweled miniature carved stone skulls) loves ornamental stones and limits decoration of the La D to various stones for the dial such as onyx, tiger's eye or malachite and occasionally diamonds.

This year my favourite La D is the opal dial version in white gold with a manual winding Zenith Elite movement. A simple two-hand watch that shimmers quietly with style and panache that makes it a very contemporary and oversized take on the jewellery watch that a woman could wear without looking like a bimbo.

While Victoire de Castellane is interested in unusual stone dials, the Christal is playing with traditional complications and the Chiffre Rouge is flexing more mechanical muscle, a common thread ties together the three watch ranges: it is evident that style cues are coming from the buzz of the pavements of avenue Montaigne, not from the valleys of Swiss watchland. ☺

