

Q&A



Since joining Bonhams in 1998, watch enthusiast and designer, Paul Maudsley has risen to the position of International Director of Watches instigating several major changes along the way.

When did your interest in watches begin?

When I was 12, my grandmother gave me a Gruen Curvex that had been given to her during the Second World War. From that moment onwards I was hooked - I became fascinated with all things mechanical, but especially timekeeping.

How did you come to your current position at Bonhams?

After school I studied Art and Design at York College of Art and went on to qualify in Ceramics and 3D Design at Derby University. I had always enjoyed auctions and, as I said, I had a huge passion for watches so when I realised that I could combine the two as a job, I had found my perfect career. The major London auction houses were the obvious places for me to concentrate on and in 1998 I was offered a position at Bonhams cataloguing clocks and watches - both, as the sales were combined back then. When I first started, horology auctions only took place in London but now we also hold sales in New York, Hong Kong and Dubai and have a real International presence in the watch world.

Creating the dial and machining the slots for the strap lugs.



Proposed case and dial layout.



The Maudsley Tourbillon.

You must feel like a kid in a candy shop just going to work every day? Are there still pieces that excite you or are they all just part of the job now?

I never get tired of my work or find my passion fading - in fact, some people may say I'm a little obsessed. But I am in the fortunate position of going to work every day, never knowing what I am going to find or unearth. I have handled so many fantastic pieces over the past 12 years, including a platinum Patek Philippe ref. 3974, which sold for a world auction record price of £355,000 in May 2006, an extremely rare early 17th-century enamel pocket watch case, attributed to Louis Vautyer and the Zimmerman Collection in 2002, which encompassed a single-owner

collection of watches and other horological pieces. And I will never stop getting a kick out of being able to tell people that the watch they have had for so long is a very valuable piece.

My principal role at Bonhams is gaining new business, whether that involves a single watch or a large collection. But the days are really varied, which is what makes my job so interesting - one day I could be in Milan on a valuation day, the next in the office researching a rare 17th-century pocket watch.

If you weren't at Bonhams, where would you be?

Another passion of mine is flying and I am currently training for my pilot's licence. In another life I see myself flying a Tornado

GR4, but this time round I think a Cessna 172 will have to do!

Are you a collector yourself?

I do have a modest collection of pocket watches and wristwatches, with the main focus being chronographs.

You are so passionate about horology that you have even designed your own piece - the Maudsley Tourbillon. How did this come about?

It came about in 2008 when I sold some watches for a New Zealand-based watchmaker called Michael Beckingham. The pieces were 18th- and 19th-century pocket watch movements, housed in cases that Michael had made and I was struck by



The hand-made cases by Michael Beckingham that led to the completion of Paul's dream.

how incredible his work was. I had been toying with the idea of creating a timepiece for some time and after a long discussion with Michael I asked him if he would like to undertake the project for me.

Sadly I can't physically be hands on as the workshop is in New Zealand, but Michael has done an amazing job of interpreting my sketches, dial layout and types of finishing. And the hand engraving of the nameplates was done by the engravers at R&A Giddings in London, who produce some of the finest work in the world.

Is the Maudsley Tourbillon a commercial enterprise?

Not at all. The whole exercise was about making a watch for me - something that I had dreamed of for a long time. Finding Michael was the missing piece of the jigsaw. It is hard to describe how I felt when I first held the piece in my hands - it took quite a while to get used to seeing my name on the dial, rather than say Patek

Philippe or Rolex, which I am a lot more used to.

So is there just one Maudsley Tourbillon in existence?

So far yes. I'm still wearing it and gaining huge enjoyment from it.

Why did you specifically want to build a tourbillon?

I could have chosen one of many different movements to use, but the tourbillon is a beautiful form of escapement and one that you can take pleasure from seeing daily. I wanted something that was elegant yet sporty and a watch that reflected my other big interest - cars. And I feel that I have achieved that.

Are there any more models in the pipeline?

I am currently in the process of designing something else. Although the Maudsley Tourbillon will always be a truly special

watch for me, the experience of seeing its stages of development was addictive. I would like to utilise a new ebauch that came out last year - the movement is more complicated with moon-phase and power reserve, it is still a tourbillon though. So in my spare time I have been designing a new dial and a slightly different case design.

As an auctioneer and designer are there any other watchmakers or houses that you particularly admire?

There are so many to name but in terms of the modern watchmakers I particular like Roger W Smith's work, which really is some of the finest watchmaking anyone will ever see. I also look forward to seeing the new Charles Frodsham & Co wristwatch, which I believe is coming out this year. These two English watchmakers particularly stand out for me as they make every single part of their watches and are, therefore, at the highest level of watchmaking in the world. ☺