

Ex Africa



Semper aliquid novi. This year Baselworld entertained many themes; elegance, refinement, creative ingenuity, but in at least one dark corner raw, primal passion was pulsing to the rhythm of African drums. Gerald Genta infused their latest model with all the intensity of the Savanna wilderness and it fell upon the intrepid **Simon de Burton** to seek out the beating heart of the new 'Safari'.

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Gerald Genta "Safari", caliber GG 1004 has a GP3100 movement, 45 hour power reserve, two balance wheel shock absorbers, with a bronze case measuring 46.50 mm diameter and a thickness of 19.30 mm.

I must confess to a near lack of diligence during this year's Baselworld fair. After a mere three days and an estimated 15 miles of trudging dutifully between as many of the 300-plus 'brandstands' as possible, a certain watch weariness was, I admit, beginning to creep in. It became so intense that, for a fleeting second, I considered abandoning my duty to peruse the latest from Gerald Genta... until, that is, I encountered *QP's* editor departing the GG booth.

"Not sure I can face going in there," I said.

"Well, I suggest you pull yourself together and change your mind," came the uncompromising reply.

Yes, probably a good idea. And how right he was, because much against expectations I encountered a watch that might even have been my favourite from the whole event.

Quite why I am so enamored with the Gefica 'safari' watch I can't explain. Retrograde displays are not really my thing, neither are nodule-covered cases, weird-shaped hands or bubble crystals - and reading a lot of marketing mumbo-jumbo about 'rugged masculine strength drawn from the African Mother Earth' would usually be enough to put me off altogether.

Yet six months on and I'm still struggling against the urge to buy one.

The rugged history

The original Gefica was created back in 1988, allegedly after a group of big game hunters got chatting about watches during an idle moment around the campfire. Their family names were Geoffroy, Fissore and Canali and the first two letters of each were conjoined to create the name Gefica.

The principal feature of the watch lay in the use of a bronze alloy for the case (a non-reflective material that will prevent any conspicuous glints from the sun) that was then decorated with a beaded pattern, inspired by certain styles of tribal body painting. Although it measured a rather puny 33mm in diameter, the early Gefica had a powerful presence and was available in a range of dial colours and versions, including skeleton, moonphase and simple, two-handed types. Lady's Geficas were also produced, some of these being just 23 mm in size.

These first generation Geficas from the late '80s and early '90s used to make fairly regular appearances at auction until around 10 years ago,





The dappled markings encircling the outer edges reflect the idea of the ceremonial body art found in numerous African tribal traditions.

since when the supply has slowed to a trickle. They could be bought for as little as £300 and rarely fetched more than £1,000, although Antiquorum did hammer down a late and unusual 36mm example with a gold case at a New York sale in 1999 for \$17,250. The re-introduction of the model is very likely to cause prices of the originals to rise.

Evolving style

So what about the new model? Well, in keeping with contemporary style it has grown to a statement-making 46.5 mm in diameter, although the tapered case means the back is 4.5 mm narrower. The material is largely bronze with titanium

rings encircling the top and bottom and decorated with the bead pattern said to have been inspired by tribal body painting. The domed winding crown is similarly adorned.

The dished dial - intended to resemble a volcanic crater - is made from brass galvanised with a choice of bronze and silver or bronze and black finishes and topped with a distinctive convex crystal. The manufacture movement, which is visible through the display back, is Genta's well-known 'Biretro' with incremental hour display and 'reinitialisation' minute indicator. The finish, of course, is superb.

Although such a mechanism is often regarded as being more suitable for dress watches, the Biretro boasts enhanced shock resistance, meaning the Gefica is probably able to handle the recoil from a hunting rifle. And just in case you need to chase your quarry into Lake Chamo, the watch is also 10 ATM water resistant.

Gerald Genta has, however, made one glaring error in the creation of the Gefica and that is by choosing to supply it with an alligator strap - as any big game hunter will tell you, alligators are only found in China and the USA. The Safari's strap should have been made from crocodile. African crocodile. ◯