



A Vitruvian Watch

🕒 Reinventing the IWC Da Vinci was always going to be tough. The line is a genuinely noble and innovative one, not least because it reverted to mechanical innards when the future seemingly belonged to quartz. Which, ironically, is where the Da Vinci's roots can be found.

Ken Kessler

As far back as 1969, IWC used the Da Vinci name for its Reference IW9500, a watch now so dated that it's bound to be considered 'cool' in certain quarters. You know the species: media types who read too much *Wallpaper**. A TV-screen shape, a link bracelet that follows the contours of the case - it would be easy to dismiss this as an aberration in Da Vinci lore, but it was a product of the times. Call it 'proto-bling'.

To qualify it retrospectively as deserving of the Da Vinci name, it's worth noting that the IW9500 was probably the first wristwatch to feature the Beta 21 quartz movement, jointly developed by several Swiss watchmaking companies. But it was no mere throwaway, IWC issuing it in white gold, yellow gold or platinum. After all, who knew then that quartz would devolve into mass market *dreck*?

The adoration of mechanics

For the purist, though, the first 'true' Da Vinci is the Reference 3750 of 1985. And it was a gem, an

unexpected delight for the under-threat audience of mechanical timepieces - then still clawing its way back from the brink of extinction. At a time when very few consumers bandied about words like 'complications' or 'power reserve', the 3750 was a sneak preview of the world of high-end watches for the coming millennium.

Even today, its specification is dazzling. IWC delivered to the connoisseur a watch with multiple complications that *wasn't* a nightmare to use. Round-cased, and free of horn-style lugs to hold the strap, the mechanical Da Vinci mixed modern and classical aesthetics, and it has survived a couple of decades without looking as dated as its predecessor.

Among its functions was a perpetual calendar with a four-digit year display, moon phase and a chronograph, making the Da Vinci the world's first automatic to possess this mix. Master watchmaker Kurt Klaus developed the perpetual calendar and, fittingly, the new line-up includes a limited edition model in his honour.



(Left) IWC Da Vinci, ref. IW9500 (1969), probably the first wristwatch to feature the Beta 21 quartz movement. (Centre) The IWC Da Vinci ref. 3750 was introduced at the 1985 Basel Fair. It is an automatic chronograph perpetual calendar that shows the century and year in a numeric display. The perpetual mechanism would go on to be the most widely sold in history. (Right) Da Vinci Reference IW3755 (1986), made from the then-radical material, zirconium oxide, gave the case a charcoal/black colour.

Though now a *de rigueur* combination for highly complicated watches, a perpetual calendar with chronograph was virtually unheard of in 1985, and its seriousness was augmented by precision timekeeping of one-eighth of a second. Adding to its appeal, IWC mechanically programmed its perpetual calendar for a mind-boggling 500 years. All of this was adjustable via the crown, rather than through a plethora of small and inconvenient press buttons.

That very first Da Vinci's calendar will function without factory intervention until 2499, although it does require an internal adjustment on 1 March 2100, to account for a skipped leap year. A century later, the four-digit century display will also require a service to replace the century digits with a cylinder numbered 22, 23 and 24. But that's one for your great-great-great-great-great-grandchildren to worry about.

A year after the mechanical Da Vinci appeared, IWC used the platform for another revolutionary feature, which we now take for granted. While the Da Vinci Reference IW3755 looks slightly odd, due to its charcoal/black case colour, that case was made from the then-radical material,

zirconium oxide - one of the early modern ceramics. Over 20 years ago, ceramics were fragile and tricky to machine, but IWC was charmed by the scratch resistance and the near-immunity to 'chemical and mechanical influences.' Nowadays, you can even buy a ceramic-cased Panerai.

A Renaissance

More exciting still was the Da Vinci of 1995, which marked the family's 10th Anniversary (if you start counting with the mechanical 3750). The Da Vinci Rattrapante Reference IW3751 added a tenth hand to the watch, providing the chronograph element with a split-seconds function.

Respect for the earlier Da Vinci line bodes well for the new models. In recent years, vintage models have performed well in auctions. In June of 2007, Antiquorum sold a yellow gold 3750 for US\$11,210, while 10th Anniversary Rattrapantes typically command another \$6000. And the curious ceramic Da Vinci of 1986? Don't expect much change from US\$10-15,000.

Which raises another point about the original, mechanical Da Vinci, a key

quality which 'put it on the map' 22 years ago: back then, it offered more true value - complications, innovation, credibility - than anything produced by a rival at even twice the price. If you study those second-hand values, and factor in a weak dollar, the IWC Da Vinci starts to look like a genuine bargain.



Da Vinci Chronograph ref. IW3764. The tonneau shaped case is available in platinum (silver plated dial), 18ct. white gold (slate-grey ardoise dial), 18ct. rose gold (silver-plated dial) or stainless steel (black dial), with a diameter of 43 mm.

The Da Vinci Chronograph

It's the big deal of the year for IWC, apart of course from Kevin Spacey and Cate Blanchett appearing at their show in Geneva. It's IWC's flagship collection, it houses a new completely in-house movement. There is even a version dedicated to the wonderful and inventive Kurt Klaus. And as **Ken Kessler** writes, the new Da Vinci occupies a unique niche in recent watch history.

James Gurney

Given all this, the high impact launch of the 2007 re-invention of the Da Vinci in Florence's Uffizi Gallery was entirely appropriate. So why do I keep feeling there is something missing?

The collection itself is impeccable in its own terms. At centre stage is the

new chronograph - the complication that kept mechanical watchmaking a profitable business at even the bleakest moments following the quartz revolution. It's also an appropriate choice as it is the one type of movement that still presents real challenges to watchmakers in terms of pure function. The 89360 calibre is an integrated movement incorporating a host of new and improved ideas as well as a careful rethinking of what a mechanical chronograph can offer in an era of electronic timing that counts in 1/1000th s or less.



An unexpected delight for the under-threat audience of mechanical timepieces.



Calibre 89360 has an automatic movement with a 68 hour power reserve 28,800 vibrations per hour. The Chronograph is equipped with an improved shock-absorbing system, adopted from the Ingenieur line and is fitted with a Nivarox balance spring that oscillates with lower energy requirements.

An announcement

Firstly the movement is conceived of as a sports watch so the basics such as the escapement and winding system were chosen with this in mind. No index on the balance wheel as too open to shock, up-dated Pellaton winding-system that improves winding efficiency so that a lighter rotor can be used leading, in turn, to less stress on the central arbour.

The chronograph elements meanwhile are decentralised allowing the read out to follow an easier to read layout - the so-called "watch within watch" concept. Incidentally this also leaves room for the addition of secondary modules such as a GMT dial in later versions.

IWC have always been good at the "here comes the science bit" moments.

Whether expounding the virtues of the Pellaton winding system, both in its original form and in the new double-pawl version, or the various refinements to their legendary perpetual calendar, IWC are prone to ditch the flannel and get straight to the detail of what, how and why. Those on the receiving end of IWC refreshingly didactic approach are left to both absorb the technical details and marvel at the skill and insight of their watchmakers.

And just in case anyone might labour under the impression that other companies might be able to match their prowess and creativity, IWC unleashes their "chief watchmaker emeritus", Kurt Klaus. Likeable, enthusiastic and endlessly patient of questions that would shame an apprentice to ask, Klaus somehow manages to express

all the qualities you could hope for in an ideal watchmaker: experience, creativity and, crucially, a gnomic mystique. He's the very model of a traditional master watchmaker.

And his recounting of the almost haphazard way the original Da Vinci prototype was completed the night before its unveiling at the Basel Fair in 1985 just added an extra lair of charm and humanity that contributes to IWC. So it was with some surprise that the unveiling of the new Da Vinci was accompanied with the news that the new movement had been created using a process called "Design for Six Sigma DFSS".

According to Wikipedia, Design for Six Sigma DFSS is a process that has the objective of "determining the needs of customers and the business, and driving those needs into the product solution created. DFSS is relevant to the complex system/product synthesis phase, especially in the context of unprecedented system development". Mysterious but somehow lacking mystique. It might just have been me, but learning that made the watches seem somehow colder.

Further information: www.iwc.com/index.asp

The final proportions

As mechanically sophisticated and well conceived as the watches are, the execution is equally good. The chrono pushers are perfectly weighted and good to use and also beautifully integrated into the case. Even the smallest details betray unending attention and thought - just look at the indices on the dial, the stepped lugs or the contrasting finishes.

So what could possibly be missing? Taking the black dial chrono to one side, which I have to admit to being one of my 2007 favourites, the collection so closely and avowedly follows the precept and examples of Leonardo himself that, somehow, the target is missed altogether. The large date automatic has perfect detail but no real soul. The perpetual calendar just doesn't need a chrono element - which, by the by, shares little of the qualities of the "pure" chrono.

Such cavils aside it has to be said that IWC have made a good first of re-imagining what is their most iconic watch - Kurt Klaus certainly looked proud and I'm utterly deceived if his acting is up to his watchmaking. ○

A Special limited Edition of the Da Vinci has been produced in honour of IWC chief designer Kurt Klaus. It combines the original perpetual calendar chronograph with an automatic movement developed by the man himself.

