

# The Water's Fine

Not since the Seventies  
has the Nautilus felt so  
right. QP dives on in...

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Patek Philippe's CEO, Philippe Stern was in notably good form at the Nautilus anniversary party, held in Geneva last November - even to the rare point of sallying a few jokes in public. Stepping back in time to the Seventies was the obvious and natural theme to the launch party held for the new collection. Set in a suitably off-the-beaten-track venue dressed to recall the flavour of the clubs that followed in the wake of Disco icons like Studio 54, the Nautilus party had an intriguing atmosphere. The norm for this sort of thing is for the CEO or MD to reverently recall events in the 'proper' past - when watchmakers were watchmakers and quartz was rock rather than horological Kryptonite. But the late Seventies is a much closer era, on this side of the last century's cultural watersheds, and therefore easier to recall - even if most of those present were yet to graduate from short trousers.

So what difference did all this make, quite apart from the fact Patek was celebrating *this* generation's achievements and, particularly, the moment when the company lived up to and beyond the standards of the real past? As the leading luxury watchmaker of the time (how long has Patek held this position?) and as a pioneer of quartz technology (the 3597/2 calibre 21 quartz was launched in 1970), Patek was well placed to ride out the waves that shook the industry in the early Seventies. However, quartz technology created a taste for ever finer and slighter designs and the company soon realised that it was leaving customers with little to wear for those few moments when they might emerge from the night clubs and indulge in more active pursuits. As even Bond ended up wearing a Seiko, it was clear that rules were changing.



The star of the new Nautilus collection, and only the second repository of Patek's year-old auto-chrono' movement: ref. 5980/1A (£18,770). Here, the target-like monocoounter looks much more at home than on the 5960 Annual Calendar Chronograph.



### Dr Octagon

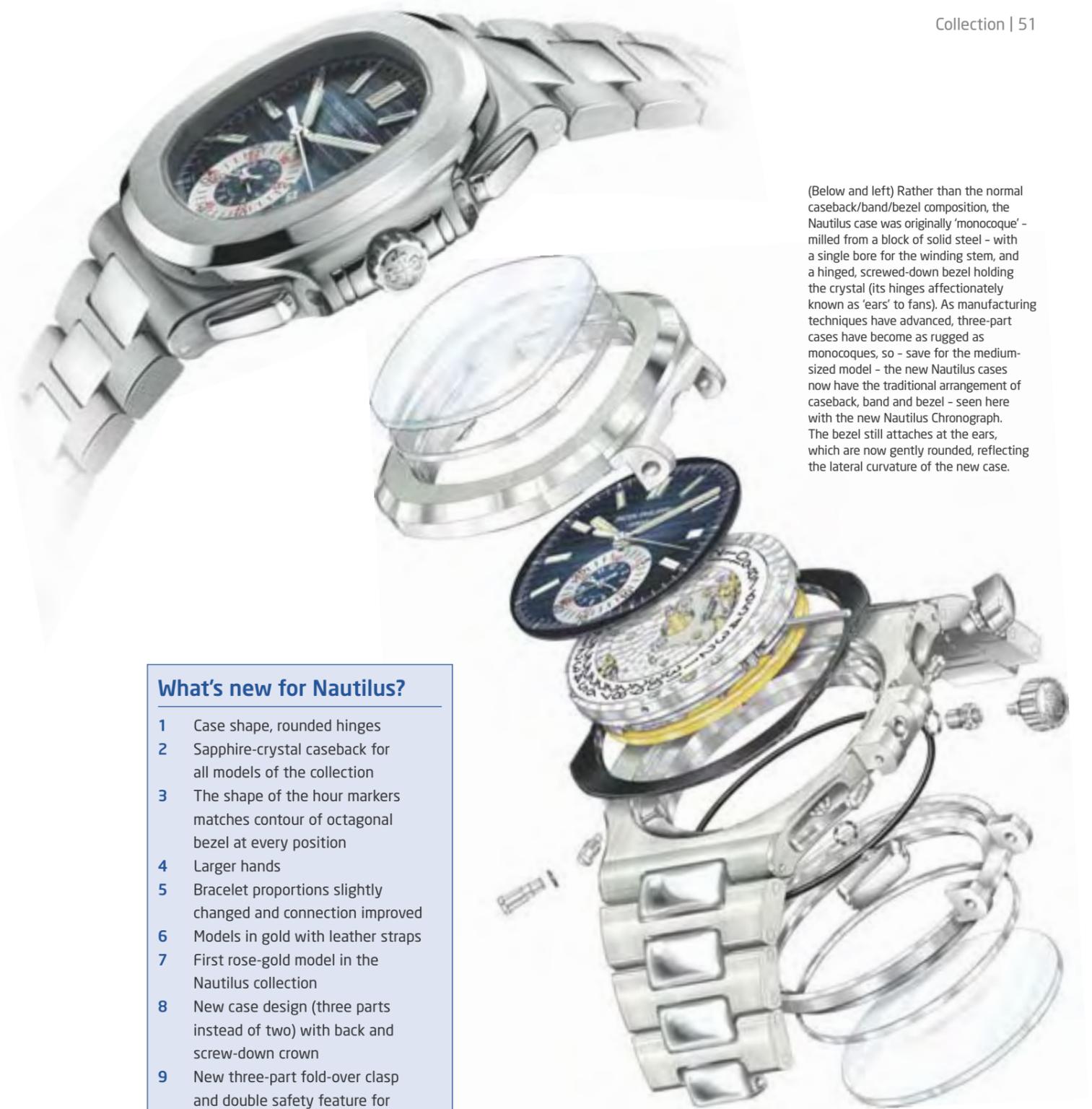
Enter Gérald Genta, the watch designer of the decade (Royal Oak, Ingenieur, etc., etc.), who created a truly groundbreaking and modern design. The new shape, with its obvious nautical flavour managed to express the sporty capabilities of the watch without alienating a market that still looked for slimness and elegance as essential qualities in a watch. The success of the Nautilus' design in achieving this goal and disguising the watch's then-oversize dimensions was based on two complementary elements: the rounded octagonal bezel and the seamless integration of case and bracelet. The soft octagon seemed to flatten the watch, disguising its depth and, through the bright finish, blurring its own dimensions. This may seem to be labouring the point, but the 42 mm width of the Nautilus was a fifth as big again as the standard luxury watch of the time - only in the last five years has the 'standard' grown above 40 mm.

Genta's design was about more than disguised dimensions however. Patek Philippe's plan included performance above the average as well. The hinged monocoque case (hinged and secured by those distinctive 'ears') was secure enough to promise water resistance up to 120 m - a rating only matched or exceeded by far more chunky and utilitarian designs such as the Seamaster 300 and the various Rolex Oyster models of that time. And, as if the design belied the performance, the Nautilus was launched in stainless steel - cue those wonderfully dated copylines about the watches working "as well in a wet suit as they do with a dinner suit".



(Top left) The original 'Jumbo': Nautilus ref. 3700, which tore-up the luxury-watch rulebook in 1976. It was a steel watch that cost more than most gold models of the day, with rugged looks that ignored the trend for ever thinner dimensions. Patek won fans and sceptics alike, but its daring move simply satisfied a growing demographic of wealthy individuals that juggled their boardrooms and cocktail parties with yachts and tennis. (Top right) Thirty years on - the new ref. 5711/1A (£9,910), 1 mm wider at 43 mm (including 'ears') with softer edges and chubbier hands.

(Below) A new element to the Nautilus is the sapphire crystal caseback. Here, Patek's dependably excellent level of finish can be admired on the ref. 5711's automatic calibre 315 SC.



(Below and left) Rather than the normal caseback/band/bezel composition, the Nautilus case was originally 'monocoque' - milled from a block of solid steel - with a single bore for the winding stem, and a hinged, screwed-down bezel holding the crystal (its hinges affectionately known as 'ears' to fans). As manufacturing techniques have advanced, three-part cases have become as rugged as monocoques, so - save for the medium-sized model - the new Nautilus cases now have the traditional arrangement of caseback, band and bezel - seen here with the new Nautilus Chronograph. The bezel still attaches at the ears, which are now gently rounded, reflecting the lateral curvature of the new case.

### What's new for Nautilus?

- 1 Case shape, rounded hinges
- 2 Sapphire-crystal caseback for all models of the collection
- 3 The shape of the hour markers matches contour of octagonal bezel at every position
- 4 Larger hands
- 5 Bracelet proportions slightly changed and connection improved
- 6 Models in gold with leather straps
- 7 First rose-gold model in the Nautilus collection
- 8 New case design (three parts instead of two) with back and screw-down crown
- 9 New three-part fold-over clasp and double safety feature for leather straps
- 10 New case dimensions:
  - New medium size: 38.40 mm (original medium size: 37.5 mm)
  - New 'Jumbo' size: 43 mm (original 'Jumbo' size: 42 mm)
  - Size of new chronograph: 44 mm
- 11 New complication: in-house self-winding chronograph (ref. 5980/1A)

Given the enormous demand for the 30th anniversary models, it is fair to claim classic status for the Nautilus design, even though the model never really took off in the way Patek might have hoped. This is at least an explanation for some of the less attractive variants that appeared fairly quickly after the launch of the original. The late Seventies being the time it was, it should not really be a surprise to find smaller, bi-metal quartz versions in the auction catalogues! However, if the Nautilus never sold in epic quantities, the watch did remain on the catalogue, though the 42 mm was discontinued in 1990.



### Jumbo jets back

As a taste for ever-larger watches slowly developed in the late Nineties, interest in the Nautilus was rekindled. The 1997 launch of the 'sportier' Aquanaut collection was followed by the re-introduction of the original 'Jumbo' size in 1998. Recent years saw expansion of the collection with precious metals (white gold in 2004) and the introduction of a small complication - the ref. 3712 with small seconds, moonphase and power reserve - in 2005. By the time this last watch was launched, the desire for Nautilus watches among Patek collectors had risen to near boiling point, no doubt a function of the upcoming anniversary as well.

The long-awaited 30th anniversary collection keeps close to the original, with most of the updates being subtle and natural. The new models are slightly less angular, for example, perhaps to disguise the increased dimensions. This is an approach applied to smaller details such as the hands and hour markers, the effect being to give the Nautilus a more contemporary feel. Also in line with current tastes is Patek's introduction of sapphire casebacks.

More radically, the collection now includes pink-gold models, which work extremely well; a much warmer alternative to the traditional white metals. Equally radical but less successful are the leather strap versions, which seemed somehow anaemic in effect at the launch, caught somewhere between the 'proper' Nautilus and the rubber-strapped Aquanauts.

Clearly the most important change has been the decision to incorporate the new automatic chronograph movement that Patek Philippe unveiled earlier last year. Far more at home in the Nautilus case than its first incarnation (the ref. 5960 Annual Calendar Chronograph), the 44 mm Nautilus chronograph with its 'bullseye' monocounter display was the undoubted star of the collection and has proved equally popular with collectors.

(Top left and left) While radical in design and concept, Nautilus was still a child of its time when it came to advertising and the inevitable bi-metal variants.

(Right) Taking over from the ref. 3800/1A, the new medium-sized Nautilus (ref. 5800/1A; £9,390) has grown by 0.9 mm in diameter. Unlike the other new models, the 5800/1A retains the two-part monocoque case, but with a sapphire caseback.



(Above) Despite the complicated nature of ref. 5712's calibre 240 PS IRM C LU, the choice of a mini-rotor helps to keep the movement height down to just 3.98 mm.

(Above right) The ref. 5712 takes over from 2005's short-lived cult hit, the ref. 3712. Unusually complicated for a sports watch, the power reserve, subsidiary seconds and date/moonphase indicators combine effortlessly. Available in steel with bracelet (5712/1A; £12,515), and rose or white gold with a matching strap (5712 R & W; both £15,800). Unfortunately, the moonphase corrector button halves the Nautilus' usual water resistance, to 60 m.

Here, however, is the greatest point of difference with the original Nautilus launch in 1976. Then, you would have been able to buy one almost immediately after its launch. Now, you will have to wait a bare minimum of one year, even if you have the strongest connections to the company. At this point, even the Salons are refusing to give an estimate of when they will be able to supply the steel chronograph.

At the launch party, Philippe Stern presented the collection in tandem with Thierry Stern, his son and heir-presumptive to Patek's helm. It was impossible to avoid the impression that Thierry was also being presented with the weight of the Patek legacy, echoing the challenge Patek Philippe faced in the Seventies. The house's rude health in 2007 surely accounts for part of the smiles that wreathed M. Stern's face. ○

**Further information:** Patek Philippe Salon, 15 New Bond Street, London W1S 3ST, Tel: 020 7493 8866, www.patek.com



Thirty years of the Nautilus			
1976	Ref. 3700/1A	Presentation of first Nautilus, nicknamed 'Jumbo'	Production discontinued 1990
1981	Ref. 3800/1A	Launch of medium model	Discontinued 2006
1981	Ref. 4700/1A	Launch of ladies' model	Discontinued 2006
1998	Ref. 3710/1A	Relaunch of large 'Jumbo' model with winding-zone indicator 'IZR'	Discontinued 2006
2004	Ref. 3711/1A	Launch of large model in white gold	Discontinued 2006
2005	Ref. 3712/1A	Launch of first Nautilus 'Complication', with large case, moonphase and three complications	Discontinued 2006
2006		Launch of new collection	