

# Suited &

# Booted

Chaumet's Belle Epoque elegance gets a dose of functionality with the dapper Dandy's new chronograph and power reserve models

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"The market for tiaras is not so big now" jokes the President of Chaumet, surrounded by showcases full of antique sparkling head ornaments. Following the Parisian jewellers' acquisition from the Invascope Group by LVMH in 1999, the jovial Thierry Fritsch is the first to admit that taking over a 220-year-old company known for its tiaras was not a run-of-the-mill job.

So how has a house famed as jeweller to Napoleon charted its path in the arena of modern-day luxury and horology? No better place to start than at the very heart of its history - the 18th century 12, Place Vendôme showroom-cum-museum where everything started back in 1780 - in order to discover more about Chaumet's watches, which represent 40% of the firm's business today.

### Back in time

Boutiques are important to Chaumet, as it only sells through its own network. A great amount of thought and design has been invested in them. Indeed, the flagship store in Place Vendôme opened only a year ago. Beyond its ornate marble exterior is an interior created by French architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte, known for his work at the Louvre. Wilmotte's renowned sensitivity in melding contemporary, pared-down design with historical buildings is reflected by the Chaumet boutique's cobalt-blue furniture, the louro faya wooden floors so beloved of designers today, striated glass, pools of halogen lighting sparkling jewels and burgundy stone, which all create a sleek yet opulent look. Take the gleaming all-glass lift up to the first floor and the contrast could not be greater.

(Left) Chaumet's new Dandy Chronograph models (leather strap, £2,200; steel strap, £2,400), driven by the self-winding ETA 2894 movement. The asymmetric 'bayadère' stripes motif is reflected in the bracelet model's asymmetric links.

Cool steel and minimalism give way to the Belle Epoque grandeur of the perfectly proportioned Grand Salon, which overlooks the Vendôme column outside. Lemon oak and chestnut inlaid floors, ornate carved doors, portraits and a ceiling fresco of cherubs have been recently restored by the same artisans who brought glory back to Versailles. With light filtering through dove-grey curtains and catching the bevelled edges of mirrors and the gilt columns, it is not hard to believe this was the very room where Frederick Chopin played and composed his last mazurkas.

The adjacent museum houses a collection of jewels and even some watches, all chronicling Chaumet's rich history. The walls of the museum room are lined with hundreds of silver models of tiaras reflecting the changing style of jewellery and 'bijoux de tête' since 1802, when founder Marie-Etienne Nitot became official jeweller to Napoleon.



(Above) Chaumet's headquarters, flagship store and museum, at 12, Place Vendôme. It is the site of the original workshop, where Chaumet has grown from generation to generation since its foundation by Marie-Etienne Nitot in 1780.

Chaumet's height of tiara-making was in the Belle Epoque period at the end of the 19th century when Joseph Chaumet married into the firm. This is the period most consistently evoked by the contemporary brand's designs.

### On the boulevards

But we are not here just to revel in history. Chaumet has a new watch to show us from its Dandy collection - the first collection solely dedicated to men. An atmosphere of masculine indulgence is set by the imposing, dark-panelled Salon des Maquettes and the surrounding sketches of Maharajas' peshwa headgear set with improbably large gems. We are shown a 1920s poster advertising a tiara in the Empress Josephine style. "What does this have to do with a new men's chronograph and power reserve?" you may ask.

A lot in fact, as the characteristic vertical stripes that run through the dial of the Dandy were in fact inspired by the 'bayadère' background of this poster. The name for the cushion-shaped collection, first launched in 2003, comes of course from Chaumet's tradition of providing the most elegant men with the *accessoires du jour*: tie pins, shirt studs, cuff links, signet rings and other adornments to catch the eyes of über-dandies like Prince Anatole Demidoff, Marquis de Montesquiou and Sacha Guitry. Conceived as an elegant dress watch on a silk 'tuxedo' strap to match your evening wear, the first Dandy was worn by none other than the dashing Jeremy Irons.



The collection's latest incarnation has taken a confident and accomplished step forward. As well as being a discreet timekeeper for the Martini moments in your life, it has become more functional, with the choice of chrono' and power reserve models. As part of the LVMH group, and therefore sister to Zenith, it comes as no surprise that the limited edition Réserve de Marche is furnished with a manual winding movement "from a highly regarded Swiss watch manufacturer." Zenith would be an educated guess, confirmed perhaps by a smile from Fritsch.

### Touch of blue

Every detail of each new Dandy has been worked and re-worked to please even the most demanding aesthete. "Chaumet is very much design-led, insists Fritsch. "Unlike others who start by making the movement and putting it in a big case and adding a strap, we do the opposite as design is very important to us." So if you thought that black was, well, black, look again. On the onyx dial, a delicate play of satin-finish, opalin overlay and guilloché add depth, shine and subtlety. So why the flash of cobalt on the seconds hand? Simply because that famous dandy of our times, Yves Saint Laurent noted that a black outfit was never complete without a touch of blue. Move the watch in the sunlight and a blue hue floats delicately over the dial. A clever anti-reflective coating with a blue tinge has been applied to the inside of the glass - sure to titillate the most sybaritic of dandies.

"As our watches are sold only in our boutiques, people buy them firstly because they are Chaumet; they are not comparing them with other watches," says Fritsch. With both design and mechanical integrity intact here, it seems the dapper man about town need not bother with comparisons anyway. And why pass up an excuse to visit the 12, Place Vendôme headquarters to witness such *objets du désir, in situ*? Should you not find yourself in the *quartier* however, the essence of Chaumet has been transported to the UK with the Sloane Street boutique and a new retail presence in Harrods. But still, nothing quite replaces the view of Place Vendôme from that first floor salon, surrounded by the tiaras and diamonds. ○



(Above) New for Chaumet this summer were turquoise versions of its established Class One models, with rubber straps, diamonds and lacquered dials. All are steel, with quartz movements. (Top to bottom: small model, £2,330; medium model with date, £1,460; chronograph model, £3,900.)

(Opposite page) The new white-gold Dandy with Power Reserve, in a limited edition of 100 (£6,400). Its calibre CP 12 V-1 (an abbreviation of the address, 'Chaumet Paris Vendôme 12') has a 50-hour reserve, indicated by the azure-blue dial at 2 o'clock.

(Below) Side view of the new Dandy Chronograph. An anti-reflective coating with a blue tinge has been applied to the inside of the glass, to complement the new models' subtle touches of blue.



**Further information:** Chaumet Boutique, 49 Sloane Street, London SW1 9SN. Tel: 020 7254 0045, [www.chaumet.com](http://www.chaumet.com)