

# Rock Hard

Dior's new crystal-studded ladies' watch is as tough as it is fabulous

Ian Thorley



Until recently, the worlds of fashion and high horology were poles apart. Watches were regarded by fashion houses simply as a license to be sold off to the highest bidder; the timepieces themselves were created as entry-level products to access the brands. Now fashion brands are getting serious, applying the same values to timekeeping that made their marque so desirable in the first place - none more so than Chanel, with its stalwart J12 piece, Louis Vuitton and its bulbous Tambours, and - most prominently - Dior.

Dior has already produced some defining men's timepieces: Hedi Slimane's Dior Homme 'Chiffre Rouge' was admired throughout the watch industry for its simple styling and respectful use of movements from LVMH sister brand Zenith. Now, Dior is out to produce a ladies' statement watch that advances the tentative in-roads made by its low-key Malice and Chris watches. Christal is the result.

Created by eccentric style king of Dior, John Galliano, the Christal collection celebrates 100 years since the birth of the brand's founder, and sets out Dior's stall to be number one in the fashion watch market. As Galliano told *QP*: "You need to be constantly looking for new ideas, new innovation. The better the reputation of the brand, the more you must seek to live up to the title."

## Sapphire encrusted

Innovate he has, taking sapphire crystal - usually just used to cover the dial and occasionally the caseback - and reinterpreting its function in a completely different manner. Crystals are used as both pyramidal and baguette-shaped decorative elements on the bezel, push-buttons, crown and the bracelet, giving the watch a chunky, but delicate feel. "I think the use of crystal sapphire as a decorative element is exciting. I also think that all the scratch resistance makes it as strong, daring and fearless as the women I imagine would suit wearing it... This is a watch for the woman who is as happy stage-diving as deep-sea diving." (Hopefully, though, this rock chick will still be careful enough to remove her watch prior to the plunge, as water resistance only extends to 50 metres.)

The colours of the 16-piece collection reflect the hues of the brand - grey, white and pink. The range covers a time-only 28 mm dial and a 38 mm chronograph, with diamond-set pieces and the choice of either a pink or silvered finish. Each sports a unidirectional bezel. The chronograph's rather masculine proportions reflect the fashion for oversize and sporty, but it successfully captures that key ingredient of Dior - glamour. It retains a femininity not normally found in such big pieces. The woman who wears it can keep up with the boys and still co-ordinate equally well with one of Galliano's couture creations.

(Above) John Galliano's 28 mm 'Haute Couture' variant, in the new Christal collection from Dior (£2,295). The unidirectional bezel is set with 21 sapphire crystal inserts and 44 diamonds. The distinctive steel bracelet has three rows of serigraphed and pyramid-cut sapphire crystals set in white or mirror.

(Right) Eccentric *haute couturier* John Galliano, who takes over from Hedi Slimane as Dior's latest serious watch designer.



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(Above) The 28 mm 'Jewellery' models from the Cristal collection have just one row of serigraphed and pyramid-cut crystals in the bracelet (£1,595). All Cristal watches are powered by quartz ETA movements.

(Above right) Cristal's 'Haute Couture' chronograph model (£2,495) shows off the collection's distinctive pyramid-cut sapphire crystals the best, set on either white or mirror. Note the crown's engraved 'CD', in commemoration of Christian Dior's 100th birthday.



“Designing watch pieces is very exciting because, in a way, you are designing an object that is capturing something that you can never catch: time. Of course a watch has to be functional, it has a purpose and a job, but Dior's Cristal watch is sassy and sparkling, masculine on the outer shell, yet delicate and feminine on the inside,” according to Mr Galliano.

The key to Galliano's design is a knack for envisaging his customer - be they Gwen Stefani or Elizabeth Hurley - and capturing what they want; how they'll wear it. Creating timepieces is no different, apparently. The inevitably effusive press material is rather emphatic on Cristal's intended demographic, alluding indeed to a feisty mix of Liz chic and Gwen punk.

But, as Galliano reiterated to *QP*, the development process never lost sight of the technological challenge required to set Cristal apart from the two-a-penny fashion-watch marketplace. “The Cristal is a result of the combined efforts between the design process and the possible. We design with no preconceptions, and by not having ‘no’ in the vocabulary. The ateliers as much as the technicians in Switzerland do not believe in something not being possible... We like to stay researching and designing until we find out how to do it in the most exciting way possible.” ◉

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