



## Tiffany Timepieces

By John Loring

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in slipcase

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# Pioneer

Tiffany's pivotal role in the Swiss watch's Stateside success is documented lavishly by the newest addition to QP's bookshelf

Ken Kessler

Loose usage of the word 'perfect' is dangerous, so I would not apply it to this book, however much I am tempted. However, it just succeeds on so many levels that you can easily find half a dozen profiles of potential readers: watch collectors, clock enthusiasts, art deco aficionados, jewellery connoisseurs, students of upscale Americana, devoted Tiffany clientele *per se* and, yes, good old-fashioned bibliophiles - whatever their preferred subject matter. For even if the topic does not tempt you, the book itself works just as well as an object of desire alone.

Right to its endpapers, *Tiffany Timepieces* reflects the essence of Tiffany in its sumptuous production values, down to being supplied in a



The watch sales counter at Tiffany's Union Square store, photographed in the mid-1880s. Charles Lewis Tiffany himself is to the left of the central column (blurred).

Tiffany Blue Box. Its design and production quality (the book was printed in Japan) are of such high calibre that the physical form alone sets new standards. The only things they have not done are bind it in leather and gild the edges of the pages. Even opening the box is an event, with no clue that the trademark blue cardboard contains a book. Inside, you first find the gorgeous slipcase with the front and back of a Tiffany tourbillon watch printed on both sides, die-cut through the tourbillon cage to reveal the matching book jacket inside. The book itself, square and slightly smaller than an LP sleeve, is thick and weighty and luxurious. This is to printing what Valrhona is to chocolate: pure, unadulterated, almost sinful luxury.

It opens with a wonderful exchange between the great humourist Mark Twain and California's richest man ("It not only tells the hours and minutes and seconds but the turn of the tides, the phases of the moon, the price of eggs and who's got your umbrella") and carries you through the tale of a store catering to well-heeled Americans, at a time when sophistication was sourced from Europe. This alone will appeal to sociologists, for it

believes - without shouting it - the notion that the American market was far less refined than Eurosnoobs would have you believe.

Authored by the company's Design Director for the last quarter-century, *Tiffany Timepieces* discusses the subject of Tiffany's timekeepers with such panache that it must join that exclusive set of books including *La Panerai Di Firenze* and *Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso*. It does, however, eschew anorakdom, and it will not please those who value a book in terms of the 'charts and tables at the back', with production figures, serial numbers *et al.* Loring dodges all that, save for a glossary and index.

### Beyond the badge

Shorn of dry data, what makes this book of particular interest to *QP* readers is the credibility of the timepieces themselves, for Tiffany is almost alone among retailers selling 'house brand' timepieces. We have all seen watches bearing the names of the shops that sell them. In most cases, it is simply the printing of the store's name on the dial, without fanfare. (I have, for example, an absolutely standard Eberhard Traversetolo, with a retail price below £800,



The movement, face and dialless face of a Patek Philippe pocket watch delivered to Tiffany & Co. in 1928 and sold to investment banker Henry Graves Jr for the modern equivalent of \$400,000. In 1999, it sold at Sotheby's New York for the highest auction price ever paid for a timepiece - \$11,002,500.

with a dial bearing its vendor's name.) For others, they purport to be special, when the only difference is the presence of the store's name.

Tiffany & Co., however, enjoys prestige such that it has commanded dedicated models from suppliers including Patek Philippe, Audemars Piguet and Breguet. So clear your mind of any thoughts of mere 'badge engineering' or simple dial-colour changes. Thus this book is also a red flag to collectors who might have otherwise bypassed a vintage Tiffany watch, not knowing that the pedigree went beyond the name on the dial. As shown by the recent auction of a 1920s Tiffany single-button chronograph found in Australia, it does not necessarily have to say 'Patek Philippe' on the front to command a high six-figure bid.

Loring is first and foremost concerned with design, so readers are treated to wonderful reproductions of artists' impressions and production sketches. The progression from

pocket watches and long-case clocks, through to wristwatches, mantel clocks and travel clocks coincides with the evolution of the art nouveau and art deco movements, so you can add another group of readers who will benefit from this book: art history students. And for another sub-group - the star-struck - the book is so rich with celebrities that it is also a glimpse of the USA's ruling class for the last century-and-a-half. Tiffany watch owners included people as disparate as Houdini and the Sundance Kid's girlfriend (both clearly knowing more than a thing or two about escapement).

It is hard to believe that the history of a watch brand can be 'unputdownable', but make no mistake: this book is almost abnormally readable for what is still work of reference. We at *QP* are absolutely captivated by this book and cannot recommend it too highly. And, probably uniquely for a Tiffany piece, it is actually affordable. ○

Large 18-carat gold square Atlas watch (£3,150) and large sterling silver Atlas watch (£1,525). This Tiffany & Co. watch range is named after the Atlas clock that has been on the front of the Tiffany's New York stores since about 1853. The watches were designed in 1981 by author John Loring and introduced in 1983.



Further information: Tiffany & Co., Tel: 020 7499 4577, [www.tiffany.com](http://www.tiffany.com)