

Prime Time

Beyond the hype of the year's high horology rarities is an array of intriguing watches for dreamers and realists alike

BY LAURIE KAHLE



CATEGORY LEADER SKELETONS: CHOPARD



DIVING: BALL



BOATING: ULYSSE NARDIN



DRIVING: BULGARI

At January's Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie (SIHH) fair in Geneva, Richard Mille flaunted his knack for creating buzz with the \$1.65 million RM 56 Felipe Massa Sapphire. Limited to five pieces, the watch was a spectacle housed in a brawny clear sapphire crystal case that requires nearly 1,800 hours to produce. Despite the astronomical price tag and the flagrant impracticality of a brittle crystal case, the watches sold out the first day.

Meanwhile across the hall, tourbillon maestros Robert Greubel and Stephen Forsey unveiled their \$650,000 GMT, marking the first time Greubel Forsey has added a new complication to their stellar tourbillon lineup. A. Lange & Söhne stopped traffic by displaying a huge model of its Lange 1 Tourbillon Perpetual Calendar, a 100-piece limited edition priced at \$341,900. Other rarefied highlights included Jaeger-LeCoultre's \$262,000 Duomètre Sphérotourbillon and Cartier's Ronde de Cartier Minute Repeater Flying Tourbillon, considered to be a value at just under \$300,000. Such expensive musical repeating watches proliferated this year offering a step up from the overexposed tourbillon with inventive creations from Bulgari, Corum, Girard-Perregaux, Jaeger-LeCoultre, Parmigiani, Patek Philippe, Peter Speake-Marin and Van Cleef & Arpels.

While there was no shortage of breathtaking six- and seven-figure watches in 2012, such precious timepieces are produced in extremely limited quantities for precious few elite collectors. As the annual watch reviews ooh and ah over all the horological fireworks, it's easy to overlook a number of grounded watches that also are worthy of recognition for their innovative features and timely design. Rather than stick to superlatives at the highest echelons of horology, we're showcasing new and noteworthy watches from a broad spectrum of watchmakers, styles and price points.

DIVING

Ball Engineer Hydrocarbon NEDU

Honorable mention: Breitling, Alpina

Sporty dive watches are go-to everyday watches for seafarers and landlubbers alike. Though most dive watches never take the plunge, recent years have brought the development of extreme models that function at hard-to-fathom depths at which few humans would venture. This year, for example, Breitling's Superocean Chronograph M2000 is the first chronograph that functions down to 2,000 meters, while Alpina's 2012 Extreme Diver, with water-resistance down to 1,000 meters, scores style and value points for its retro design, starting at \$1,250 on a rubber strap.

Among a number of worthy dive watches this year, Ball Watch Company's Engineer Hydrocarbon NEDU (from \$4,299) stands apart for innovative functions designed to keep you safer beneath the waves on real-world dives. Named for the Navy Experimental Diving Unit (NEDU), which is responsible for operational diving and decompression rules for the United States Armed Forces, this COSC-certified chronograph powered by a reliable ETA 7750 automatic movement is the first diving watch with an automatic helium release valve incorporated into the crown. Visibility is another crucial feature in the murky depths, so Ball fits the indexes and hands with luminous micro tubes of 3H gas that literally light up the dial. The NEDU is also guaranteed to be water-resistant down to 600 meters, even if you're not.

BOATING

Ulysse Nardin Black Sea

Honorable mention: Panerai, Corum

Whether by motor or sail, riding the waves requires a rugged watch that stands up to hard knocks as well as the elements. Materials play a key role in the most interesting watches for the boating crowd this year. Panerai



MOON PHASES: MB&F



FLYING: ZENITH



DRESSING UP: PIAGET

dives in with a rugged yet lightweight Tuttonero Luminor 1950 3 Days GMT Automatic Ceramica constructed from black ceramic, including the bracelet. Meanwhile, Corum coats the case of its Admiral's Cup Challenger 44 Chrono Rubber in velvety soft rubber, which is available in four colors to match your yacht's design scheme.

Similarly, Ulysse Nardin applied a vulcanized rubber coating to the stainless steel case, bezel and pushers of its latest Marine Diver model, the Black Sea Chronograph (\$10,900), which is the first chronograph in the collection. The textured monochromatic black dial, accented with Superluminova for visibility, features a seconds counter with a hand adorned with the brand's hallmark anchor at 3 o'clock, a 30-minute counter at 9 o'clock, date at 4 o'clock, and a 12-hour counter with a red and blue hand at 6 o'clock. It's also water-resistant down to 200 meters, should you find yourself going overboard.

DRIVING

Bulgari Octo Maserati

Honorable mention: Hublot, TAG Heuer, Graham

The link between cars and watches has never been stronger with scores of new timepieces that not only take design cues and borrow materials from their automotive counterparts, but also carry the names of esteemed marques, champion drivers and famous racetracks. This fall, Hublot brings its Big Bang Ferrari with shifter-like pushers and carbon-fiber trim to the U.S. TAG Heuer pays tribute to the designer of the original Carrera with the Carrera Calibre 17 Chronograph Jack Heuer 80th Birthday Edition and Graham continues its run of beefy Silverstone models.

This year, even Bulgari entered the field with the Octo Maserati (\$32,100), incorporating a tachymeter scale on the bezel, in addition to a jump hour and four retrograde displays that are hallmarks of Gerald Genta's Octo design, which has been folded into the Bulgari range. Though the automaker's name appears only on the case back along with

the marque's trident motif, Bulgari designers picked up on Maserati design codes on the dial. The face recalls the cars' distinctive radiator grilles with vertical lines rendered in lacquer using a multistep *champlevé* technique. In this context, the retrograde displays mimic the arced, linear readouts of dashboard gauges, while the quilted leather strap is stitched to resemble a Maserati cockpit seat. Presented in a classic Maserati color scheme of silver and blue, the Octo Maserati takes the checkered flag for design.

MOON PHASES

MB&F HM3 Moonmachine

Honorable mention: Girard-Perregaux, Carl F. Bucherer, Jaquet Droz, Ulysse Nardin

Of all watchmaking's complications, the moon phase is perhaps the most romantic, connecting us to the cosmos and the very origins of our calendar. Charting lunar cycles on a wristwatch may seem superfluous today, but that may be part of the appeal of a moon phase, which is frequently paired with calendar functions. The presentation of a moon phase is often resolutely classic as seen in Girard-Perregaux's Vintage 1945 Large Date Moon-Phases or Carl F. Bucherer's Manero MoonPhase released in 18-karat rose gold this year. But some designers have gotten creative. Jaquet Droz's Eclipse Onyx reveals its moon from behind a paddle-shaped piece of black onyx, while Ulysse Nardin's Classico Luna depicts the waxing and waning of the moon in an aperture that rotates around the center of the dial every 12 hours.

Finnish watchmaker Stepan Sarpaneva makes what are probably the most striking moon phases on the market, perhaps influenced by the long winter nights in his homeland. This year, the independent watchmaker teamed up with MB&F to create three limited-edition Moonmachines (\$98,000), which pair his oversized sculpted moon with the iconoclastic time display of the HM3 Frog, so named for its protruding aluminum domes that rotate under sapphire crystals. Sarpaneva's celestial themes have been incorporated in the Moonmachine, which presents two particularly expressive

moon faces (resembling Sarpaneva's own) through a corona-shaped aperture against the backdrop of a multilayered rotor that is laser-pierced to form stars and constellations. A radical departure from the conventional, Moon-machine takes the moon phase into sci-fi territory.

SKELETONS

Chopard L.U.C XP Skeletec

Honorable mention: Audemars Piguet, Blancpain, Hublot, Glashütte, Piaget
For those who are attracted to mechanical watches for their inner beauty, skeleton models showcase the movement's intricate mechanics through the dial for all to admire. For centuries, skeletonization, the demanding technique of removing material to create a see-through movement and finely finishing it, has been revered as much as devising high complications. Skeletonizing an ultrathin movement only heightens the difficulty

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of the task—and the drama. This year, svelte skeletons from Piaget, Audemars Piguet, Hublot and others exhibit a distinctly modern edge, while Blancpain, and Glashütte Original presented skeletons that retain elements of the fanciful engraving that distinguished historical models.

For its L.U.C XP Skeletec (\$22,070), limited to 288 pieces, Chopard produced its first skeletonized movement, the self-winding L.U.C Calibre 96.17-S, equipped with two coaxial barrels supplying a 65-hour power reserve. The black open-worked bridges are plated with rhodium, which provides a visual contrast to the gilded gear wheels visible through both sides of the watch. A nickel-plated sunburst satin-brushed dial frames the intricate movement, enhancing readability while exuding a sense of elegance and modernity.

FLYING

Zenith Pilot Doublematic

Honorable mention: Alpina, Bell & Ross, Breguet, Breitling, Bremont, Hanhart, IWC, Omega, Richard Mille, Tutima

Pilot's watches came on strong in 2012 with a fleet of new models ranging from romantic retro styles to high-performance technical pieces. Notably, IWC revamped and expanded its prominent aviation lineup, Breitling unveiled a limited-edition 50th-anniversary Navitimer Cosmonaute, Bremont showed the World Timer ALT1-WT based on the C-17 watch that was originally commissioned for military use, and Bell & Ross spanned the gamut with classic Vintage WWI and WWII models to the edgy limited-edition BR01 models that emulate cockpit instruments, such as radar. Brands such as Alpina and U.S. newcomer Hanhart channeled the past while Richard Mille's RM 039 Aviation E6-B and Omega's Spacemaster Z-33 Watch went futuristic with elaborate high-tech functions for the pros.

Since the beginning, pilot's watches were designed to perform in the cockpit with the ability to handle extreme temperature variations, vibrations, and magnetic fields produced by instrumentation. In addition to being tough, they have to be easy to read, so dials are designed for

heightened legibility. Several brands including Breguet and Tutima claim a legitimate heritage in producing aviation timepieces since the early twentieth century, and Zenith is among these pioneers. This year, Zenith showcased a range of pilot's watches from the massive vintage-inspired limited-edition Montre d'Aéronef Type 20 to the high-functioning Pilot Doublematic (\$13,200 in steel). The latter is equipped with a world time function that tracks the time in various zones around the globe and is paired with a day/night indicator. The Pilot Doublematic also houses Zenith's automatic mechanical El Primero 4046 chronograph movement with two barrels—one for timekeeping and the other dedicated to the alarm function that is activated and set by a button and crown at 8 o'clock. With its blend of classic styling, practical functions, and a high-quality manufacture movement, the Pilot Doublematic flies high.

DRESSING UP

Piaget's Gouverneur

Honorable mention: Cartier, Girard-Perregaux, Jaeger-LeCoultre, Piaget, Vacheron Constantin, Van Cleef & Arpels

Dress watches tend to lean toward classic in styling, and many of this year's novelties literally reference vintage models for design inspiration. For example, Cartier's Louis Cartier Tank XL Slimline is a sleek reiteration of the original Tank from 1922, thanks to sister brand Piaget's ultra-thin hand-wound 430 movement. Vacheron Constantin and Van Cleef & Arpels revisited historic designs to create the updated Malte and Pierre Arpels (see Good Life Guide, page 46), while Girard-Perregaux's Vintage 1966 collection and Jaeger-LeCoultre's Grande Reverso 1931 Rouge also pay tribute to their ancestors.

Piaget, however, broke from the past with its new Gouverneur line that adventurously experiments with an unusual, architectural shape. The round case departs from convention with an oval dial opening featuring a round circle in the center. This results in a novel aesthetic equilibrium. Alternating satin-brushed and polished surfaces further underscore the complexity of the case's construction. Available in an automatic calendar (\$26,000), a chronograph and a tourbillon, each available in pink or white gold, the Gouverneur line includes two new ultrathin movements, a Piaget specialty. Gouverneur breaks new ground as a resolutely contemporary dress watch for the twenty-first century.

CALENDARS

Cartier Ronde de Cartier Perpetual Calendar

Honorable mention: Corum, Girard-Perregaux, Omega, Parmigiani, Rolex, Patek Philippe, Zenith

Calendar functions are useful complications that keep us up to date with varying degrees of complexity and expense. From a basic calendar that must be adjusted five times per year to an annual calendar that requires attention once per year on March 1 to the complex perpetual calendar that can run accurately until the year 2100, there are calendar watches for every budget. This year, annual calendars were noticeably on the upswing with introductions from several brands including Cartier, Corum, Girard-Perregaux, Omega, Parmigiani, Rolex and Zenith, as well as new variations from Patek Philippe, which invented the bridge complication in the 1990s.

Still, the perpetual calendar is the *ne plus ultra* of calendar watches, and Cartier released a beauty with the Ronde de Cartier Perpetual Calendar (\$53,900). Unlike many perpetual calendars that can be



CALENDARS: CARTIER



TRAVELING: SEIKO



VALUES: FREDERIQUE CONSTANT

visually confusing, Cartier's elegant dial layout is clear and easy to read with a sweeping retrograde hand marking the day, while the month and leap year indications share a sub-counter at 12 o'clock. The date is shown by a mallet-shaped hand pointing to Arabic numerals around the periphery of the dial. The automatic Caliber 9422 MC movement with a 52-hour power reserve can be admired through the sapphire crystal case-back. With bold Roman hour numerals overlaid on a white galvanized guilloché dial, Rondo de Cartier Perpetual Calendar is a refined expression of Cartier's sophisticated design codes.

TRAVELING

Seiko Astron

Honorable mention: Breitling, H. Moser, Rolex

While most complications were invented centuries ago, travel functions offer modern-day movers and shakers a useful function for on-the-go lifestyles. This year's standouts included H. Moser's sleek Meridian Dual Time,

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Rolex's SkyDweller annual calendar with GMT and Breitling's Transocean Chronograph Unitime with a universal time feature that enables the wearer to see current time in 24 time zones and adjust with the crown.

But Seiko transported travel watches into the twenty-first century with the Astron (\$3,100 on bracelet, \$2,300 on rubber strap), the first solar-powered GPS watch. On demand or automatically once a day, the Astron connects to at least four GPS satellites that pinpoint the watch's

position. Astron then instantly adjusts the time to its location with atomic clock precision. This technological marvel was made possible by Seiko's development of a patented low-energy-consumption GPS receiver that allows Astron to receive GPS signals and identify time zone, time and date data for the earth's 39 time zones. The perpetual calendar function similarly assures the date is current with, best of all, no batteries required.

VALUES

Frederique Constant Classics Manufacture

Honorable mention: Hamilton

Value is not necessarily about low price, making it a tricky issue when it comes to mechanical watchmaking. Some would argue that Jaeger-LeCoultre's now discontinued steel Master Tourbillon was an incredible value at \$56,500—the current models in gold, rose gold, white gold and platinum start at \$73,000. Still, there are brands like Hamilton which have a reputation for value as exhibited by this year's super stylish Pan Europ 2012 equipped with a modified Valjoux 7750 movement for \$1,945.

Still, the ultimate badge of honor in mechanical watchmaking is the capability to design, develop and build your own movements. Once the claim of only a handful of old-guard houses, computerized production technology has expanded the ability to produce in-house movements over the past decade. Since 2001, Frederique Constant has developed and produced movements that have included various complications—even a tourbillon with an advanced silicon escapement wheel. This year's traditional Classics Manufacture is based on a next-generation version of the brand's Maxime movement decorated with Côtés de Genève and spiral colimaçon patterns. With its timeless design, Classics Manufacture puts an in-house movement within reach for many at a price of \$2,250 in steel and \$2,550 in rose gold-plated steel. ❖

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