

Jaquet Droz revives decorative techniques in tribute to its namesake.

Enamel Instinct

In the 1780s, watchmaker Pierre Jaquet Droz produced elaborate pocket watches for the Chinese market using an ancient enameling technique called *paillonnée*, which dates to the 14th century. One such circa-1785 piece features centered seconds, an ultraflat movement, and an enameled case embedded with gold and silver ornaments and set with pearls. Over the past eight years, in homage to its namesake, the modern ▶



The Petite Heure Minute Paillonnée (left, \$33,400) was inspired by an original Jaquet Droz pocket watch (far left).

brand has resurrected this art form, producing extremely limited numbers of wristwatches with paillonnée dials, such as this year's Petite Heure Minute Paillonnée collection.

The term *paillonnée* refers to the use of spangles, tiny motifs cut from gold or silver leaf that are set in the enamel. The artist starts by layering enamel onto a special gold plate, then placing the spangles following a desired pattern into a viscous enamel layer, which is fixed in an oven. As layers of enamel are added, the piece is fired more than 10 times. The dial is then covered in fondant, or transparent enamel, for a final firing, after which it is polished. "The watchmaker has to be careful every time she puts the dial in the oven," explains Maamar Boularas, head of product, who notes that only one artisan can produce these special pieces for a few prestige brands. "The rejection rate is very high, depending on the success of each stage." The process takes at least a week, and that is if everything goes smoothly.

Over the years, Jaquet Droz has revisited age-old métiers d'art, making them as relevant to modern watchmaking as they were centuries ago. This year's Petite Heure Minute Relief, for example, portrays a hand-sculpted gold bird perched on a branch next to her nest filled with eggs and a single baby. The new Petite Heure Minute Art Deco pieces are distinguished by engraved Deco-style patterns in luminous mother-of-pearl. Lapidary work is another strong suit, as the brand continues to craft stone dials from meteorite and other exotic materials, as well as from a wide range of minerals. And enamel, which has experienced a renaissance throughout the industry, is used extensively, from solid-colored

grand feu dials that are fired multiple times in high-temperature ovens to miniature painting, depicting scenes rendered with superfine brushes. Paillonnée, however, is far more obscure and rarely seen in modern timepieces.

"This technique is central to Jaquet Droz's traditional expertise," says Boularas. "During the 18th century, he transformed the technique into an art. That's why we want to keep this special skill, which is applied to a few truly exceptional pieces, and to keep this ancestral know-how alive."

—LAURIE KAHLE

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The Petite Heure Minute Relief
(above and below, \$55,000)

