

Headline	MEET THE EXPERTS OF TIME
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YVONNE CHU

ERIC ONG



MEET EXPERTS

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DR BERNARD CHEONG



THE OF TIME

During A Journey Through Time VIII, leading figures in the world of haute horology and gemology converge under one roof. LILY ONG and CHIN POH NEE chat with three knowledgeable individuals on their respective fields

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THE WATCH SPECIALIST

ERIC ONG

This dedicated watch specialist on appreciating the value of a timepiece

In the case of ascertaining the value of a timepiece you own, Eric Ong of Bonfield Singapore, a specialised dealer knowledgeable on anything pertaining to watches, is an expert on the subject. His company has carved a niche for itself for its expertise in pre-owned timepiece sales, valuations of family heirlooms, insurance valuations, auction house consultancy, restoration, customisation of design and application of precious and semi-precious stones by qualified jewellers, among others. He has certainly done and seen it all when it comes to the subject of valuating timepieces.

Yet he takes on a very objective stance when it comes to the 'exact' value of a watch. "One of the regular questions I get is, what makes my watch valuable? It is a hard question to answer because the value lies in the owner's feelings for the watch. Ultimately, a timepiece that's a family heirloom can be more valuable than another. You may want to price it at a higher point in order to part with it," he says thoughtfully on the subject.

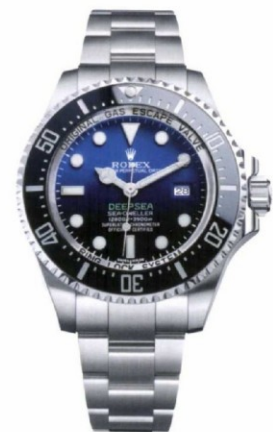
Ong encourages diligent research beforehand to ensure you are able to fix the timepiece's selling price accordingly. "In the age of the Internet, anything can be researched via Google but an experienced third party is your biggest asset and ally if you want to get it right. They will be able to know and examine every detail of your watch to give you a good selling point. For example, a fully vintage timepiece of which its movement parts are kept intact instead of replaced, would definitely be priced higher than one that has been replaced with a contemporary bracelet over the years," he says.

Finally, Ong has this piece of advice for passionate watch collectors who long to appreciate the value of their timepieces: "Take good care of your timepieces. I have to stress this many times especially for mechanical watches. Do yourself a favour by storing them well. Keep them away from household appliances to ensure your watch isn't affected by the magnetic field emitted."



"A family heirloom timepiece can be more valuable"

On this note, he states that while watch winders are useful and convenient for storage purposes, collectors should always make time in their schedules to wind the pieces manually by hand every few months or so to keep them in working order. "Do also send your watches for regular and consistent maintenance. This will enable your watch to last for a longer time and will help keep its value at a maximum," emphasises Ong.



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THE GEM TRAINER



YVONNE CHU

Discovering the idea behind Gübelin's ruby theme with its senior trainer

Fiercely, passionate, captivating—these are all but the many qualities of the red ruby. With rubies being so popular in the coloured gemstone market right now, it is no wonder that they are in the spotlight for Gübelin this year, themed 'For The Love Of Red Gems'. We speak to the senior trainer of Gübelin Academy, Yvonne Chu, about the elusive and precious red gemstone.



“The most coveted ruby is the ‘pigeon’s blood’. Getting a high-grade pigeon’s blood ruby may take a few months”

Long before diamonds became a girl’s best friend and the popular choice for engagement rings, rubies were widely accepted. They were extremely popular as engagement rings within the British royal family—Princess Anne, Sarah Ferguson and Princess Margaret have all received ruby engagement rings. In fact, Chu told us that when Prince Rainier of Monaco was about to propose to Grace Kelly, he initially procured a ruby engagement ring. Upon learning that the trend in Hollywood was diamond engagement rings, he quickly exchanged the ruby for a diamond ring. When you speak of coloured gemstones, rubies remain among the highest valued stones compared to the rest. It won’t be surprising to find that certain large rubies fetch a higher price than a diamond of equivalent size.

“The most coveted ruby colour is the ‘pigeon’s blood’—a rich and deep red,” says Chu. Another reason that makes ruby so popular is its rarity. If a customer asks her for a high-grade diamond, Chu says that she can easily procure it within a day. “Getting a high-grade pigeon’s blood ruby, however, may take a few months,” she shares.

As the senior trainer, Chu’s role is to educate participants of the Level 1 programme on the basics of colour gemstones and the right questions to ask any retailer the next time they plan to buy a piece of jewellery.

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THE MAVERICK COLLECTOR



DR BERNARD CHEONG

Learn how to invest in niche timepieces from this horology enthusiast

Over the past decade or so, the bespectacled and soft-spoken Dr Bernard Cheong has been the force of inspiration in changing the world of watchmaking from behind the scenes. While most watch collectors usually base their purchases on the names of the brand the timepieces carry, this medical practitioner by profession has been amassing pieces from niche watch brands that most people have not heard of such as Greubel Forsey, MB&F and Vianney Halter.

He counts most leading watchmakers such as the late Dato' Rolf Schnyder as a close friend. Cheong's reputation as a renowned horologist is bolstered by the fact that he holds a unique position as an influencer in the esteemed watchmaking community of the Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève.

Cheong began watch collecting in 1973, when his parents bought him the Flyback Seiko Chronograph that he wanted as a gift and from there, he eventually built on his collection with the meticulousness and precision of a treasure hunter. "Wristwatches to me are more than luxury goods. Many times my watches serve as a mirror of my inner self. Watches teach you something about yourself," he explains.

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Cheong pauses before adding: “When people ask me for advice, I always admit I don’t know everything! If you took a watch apart, I won’t be able to put it back like an expert. But through my journey in watch collecting, I learnt what kind of person I am and what makes me who I am.”

Therefore, his golden rule for selecting the right timepiece is: “Always remember that you must buy watches like you would buy a beautiful piece of art or a good bottle of wine. Take into consideration the advertising and sales messages you receive, but don’t forget to look inwards and trust your instincts. Think for yourself. Like fine wine and a good artwork, there will be a time when a watch you buy becomes ripe in the market for the plucking. There will come a time when it is ready to be sold, so you can keep it until then and enjoy wearing it.”

“Like fine wine and a good artwork, there will be a time when a watch you buy becomes ripe in the market for the plucking”

For first-time buyers, he advises, “You can choose a timepiece that has been created from the best technology this modern era can offer. Seek for watches that embrace the freedom to dream and to create.” Alternatively, seek timepieces that obey every traditional aspect of watchmaking. “These timepieces are also important, like the ones from Patek Philippe, where they still preserve the old way of making watches—the ones that probably will never be made again simply because they are too expensive to be made.

“The difference between a good and great watch can be learnt by simply visiting expensive boutiques, like the ones at Starhill Gallery in KL. Spend time there and learn; talk to the people in the shops and educate yourself,” he says, adding that you are less likely to learn if you just buy and sell a brand that everyone knows.

“It is easy to put a famous watch brand on a website for sale but you will learn nothing from it except for the law of supply and demand. Instead, by embracing the art of buying and selling niche watches, you will be able to learn a lot more about yourself,” concludes Cheong. 📍

WATCH THESE FACES

Meet the other notable luxury personalities who were in town for A Journey Through Time VIII

PETER SPEAKE-MARIN



British-born, Swiss-trained watchmaker Peter Speake-Marin’s timepieces are very much a representation of himself in his journey as a watchmaker. Although he has spent many years serving leading watchmaking brands in Switzerland throughout his career, he is mostly known for his independent work as a designer and consultant with many different companies including Harry Winston, MB&F and Maitres du Temps. Today, he is the guiding light behind his eponymous brand.

It was in the early 20th century in Besançon, the Jura of France that Cecil Purnell became fascinated by the intricacy of mechanical movements. He began a lifelong quest in pursuit of refining the tourbillon movement. His efforts left an indelible mark on those fortunate enough to know him, especially his grandson Jonathan. Inspired by his grandfather, Jonathan Purnell dedicated his life to honouring him and his vision of developing the finest Swiss luxury timepieces.

JONATHAN PURNELL



DINO MODOLO



When Bedat & Co was conceived, Dino Modolo was on hand to assist its founder Simone Bedat and her son Christian in laying the foundation of the brand. However, his own departure took place much later after the brand changed ownership. He was eventually persuaded to return to the brand as its creative director. His knowledge of the brand’s DNA enabled him to steer Bedat & Co back to its original purpose—to create the most beautiful timepieces for women.

Steven Holtzman began his career in horology when he joined Gruen Watch Company before eventually creating Helvetia Time Corporation (HTC) to distribute high-quality Swiss watch brands throughout America. In 2008, Holtzman realised his most ambitious project to date—his own brand, Maitres du Temps. With Maitres du Temps, Holtzman acts as a catalyst for today’s greatest master watchmakers to collaborate on the most innovative projects imaginable.

STEVEN HOLTZMAN

