

By Mary Lim

He operates out of a humble shophouse in a quiet Housing Board estate, but people come from all over the world to see Mr Eric Ong (right).

He is a rare breed — a watch appraiser. He helps collectors authenticate and evaluate timepieces. Connoisseurs have the performance and true market value of their watches assessed by him. He also gets requests to issue authentication certificates for insurance purposes.

Mr Kenneth Koh, who heads the Personal Lines Department of AIA — one of the two insurance companies Mr Ong works with — said more home owners are insuring their

valuables such as watches and jewellery. AIA, he says, works with loss adjustors for appraisals, but has no fixed watch appraiser.

Mr Ong, 45, admits that the path to becoming a watch appraiser has been long and hard. After a couple of years learning watchmaking under well-

known German watchmaker Horst Frederic Wege, he went to Switzerland for further training.

He worked as a watch restorer for eight years, and spent six months training as a gemologist at the Gemological Institute of America "because luxury watches naturally go

with diamonds".

During this period, he set up his own company, Bonfield Traders. After 19 years in the business, he decided to qualify as a watch appraiser. "I spent five years trying to locate master watch appraisers. Finally, I found Ann Miller, in Houston, United States, who said the only way to do it was to rely on your work experience, knowledge of the industry and market, clients' trust and word of mouth."

So he began beating on the doors of insurance companies. For five years, he met relevant people to make a case for a professional watch appraisal service for insurance purposes.

In October this year, AIA asked him to appraise timepieces that some of its clients wanted to have

# Knowing the value of time

For a rare expert on appraising timepieces, telling a customer he bought a fake is the most difficult task



PHOTO: JAMIE KOH

insured. He has about 30 cases of appraisals, and companies like Federal Insurance and NTUC Income have recognised his appraisals for their timepiece insurance cases.

He also sees up to 10 private customers a day. His charges range from \$60 for a verbal appraisal to \$200 for one with certification.

He looks at the condition of a watch, based on factors such as brand, age, case and dial, checks for accuracy of movements and verifies serial numbers. He also provides an estimate of the

cost to restore the piece to mint condition and establishes a current market value.

But nothing is as difficult as informing a customer that his watch is not authentic. "Apart from the money spent, the customer also feels betrayed by the person who sold or recommended it to him."

**Bonfield Traders is at Blk 48, Tanglin Halt Road #01-329. For appointments, call 6473-5505 or log on to [www.bonfield.com.sg](http://www.bonfield.com.sg)**