

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENTRY LEVEL PIECES

Everybody starts somewhere on the way to a watch collection. Here are a few good options

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Several years ago I visited Singapore to meet a few business contacts and to have some vacation time with my family. Prior to booking the trip, I had grown a moustache for Movember, which is a foundation that promotes men's health (in particular prostate cancer). However, I am sure that none of the people I met realised the significance and probably thought it was the typical Australian trend. On my penultimate day, I had the opportunity for a sit-down with a wealthy young collector. His collection (at the time) was pretty impressive and included signature pieces from De Bethune, Harry Winston, MB&F, Urwerk etc. I vividly remember the only relatively affordable piece he owned was an SP-1 Landship from micro brand Azimuth.

Overall I spent a couple of hours with this young Malaysian collector and it was very insightful. He explained how he had first become interested in 'Haute Horlogerie' and how he had amassed over 250 watches. Even though he wasn't purchasing watches as an investment per se, there was a certain methodology behind his choices. Essentially the primary motive was prestige as Singapore is a very affluent region and first impressions count. However, everybody has to start somewhere and that is why entry-level pieces are a great option. Presently not all luxurious brands offer (reasonably) affordable models but this is gradually changing.

Over the last few years, many watchmakers have collaborated with automotive brands. Ultimately many parallels can be made with the two industries and clever marketers seized on the opportunities. Interestingly Audi, BMW, Lexus, Mercedes, Porsche etc. all offer entry-level vehicles. That is why it would only seem natural that the world of horology would follow suit. Here are three luxury labels that see growing potential in this segment.

KONSTANTIN CHAYKIN JOKER

Recently, my 'Independent Watchmakers' book was published with Konstantin Chaykin's marvellous Lunakhod on the cover. This amazing Russian craftsman is normally associated with the production of luxurious exclusive timepieces (in some cases made-to-order). However, a couple of years ago he unveiled an affordable (around US\$8,000) and critically acclaimed piece called the Joker. This 42mm diameter watch has a light-hearted aesthetic which represents a face. Cleverly, hours and minutes are displayed on two eye dials, and a moon phase indicator doubles as a tongue. Powering the watch is a highly modified Swiss made ETA 2824-1 movement.



ULYSSE NARDIN FREAK X CARBONIUM

A few years ago I visited The Hour Glass in Singapore and got the opportunity to review the phenomenal Ulysse Nardin Freak "Blue Cruiser". No one could ever dispute the merits of this watch but the price of \$95,000 is well beyond most people's budgets. That is why I was interested to hear that the brand had unveiled a much more affordable version (starting at \$21,000) called the Freak X. Obviously, some modifications had to be made, like a smaller case and more conventional crown system, to keep the price down. However, the timepiece still has an 'Haute Horlogerie' multi-layered dial that is designed to make a bold statement. At the heart of the watch lies a sophisticated in house mechanical movement that has a power reserve of 72-hours

TAG HEUER FORMULA CALIBRE 5

Back in 2015, I had a meeting with TAG Heuer at their impressive BaselWorld boutique stall. At the time, Jean-Claude Biver had just taken the helm of the company and had some ambitious plans. Primarily this was to make the brand more competitive and attractive in the market (the world's most affordable Swiss Made tourbillon soon followed suit, but that's not the subject of this piece - Ed). Certainly, Biver achieved his goals because you can now purchase the sporty looking Formula Calibre 5 for US\$1,600. That's pretty impressive considering the watch is powered by a Swiss automatic movement and has a stylish 41mm brushed steel case. Other features include a black dial with Rhodium-plated luminescent indexes, small date window and unidirectional turning bezel. 