



Inner workings
run steadily,
so faces get a lift



Jaquet Droz

From left, nummite, a volcanic mineral discovered in 1982, makes up the face of a Jaquet Droz watch. Silvery meteorite, harvested from comets fallen to earth, is also utilized in their Classic Stones dials. Spectrolite, left, is rainbow-colored, changing hues when viewed from different angles. Below, diamonds painstakingly matched for color and size create the face of hip-hop artist Kanye West for a personalized watch by Tired. Right, a tiger's-eye Cartier dial suspended on a gold chain. Inset, a vintage watch set with coral and diamonds.



Statements written in stone

By Maisie Wilhelm

PARIS
Popular in the 1970s, watches that incorporate unusual minerals into their faces are in style again, both in vintage models back on the market and in lines like Classic Stones from Jaquet Droz. "It used to be that people would look at watches with inlaid mineral dials and say, 'They remind me of my mother,'" said Gus Davis of Camilla Dietz Bergeron, a husband-and-wife company in New York that specializes in buying and selling antique and estate jewelry. "Now they want this," Davis said of a Cartier watch on a gold chain necklace with a tiger's-eye dial and of a vintage model featuring coral and diamonds. "The 1960s and '70s look is so hot right now, and the trend will continue. You don't want a typical watch. You want it to be fun." Flashy, too. "When I want attention and I want a lot of it, I wear my diamonds," said Damon Dash, an American watch-lover and hip-hop entrepreneur, whose company, Tired, founded in 2004, produces "couture timepieces." Dash set up Tired with a Russian jewelry designer, Daniel Lazar, and they have brought a flashy extravagance to the brand. "When you get a hip-hop guy and a Russian dude together," Dash said, "you are going to have a lot of diamonds."



Tired watches make a splash, literally. Beginning at \$6,300, the Tired Splash line resembles a jet of water squirted onto the dial and crystallized into diamonds. For Dash, who grew up in the New York City district of Harlem, it is not the inside of a watch that makes it salable, or a watchmaker's long history. What matters is the statement. "When you wear a Tired watch," he said, "people want to know what it is — it's like art." In that spirit, Tired creates custom-made watches, some costing as much as \$365,000, like the one created for the hip-hop musician Kanye West, on which pixelated yellow, black and white diamonds form Kanye's face on a yellow mother-of-pearl background. People tend to think that watchmaking is all about mechanical complications, but one-of-a-kind faces have long been an important part of the business too. Jaquet Droz, a Swiss company established in 1738, is a leader among established manufacturers offering distinctive mineral dials. "Minor changes have been made in the last 270 years," said Joseph Panetta, U.S. spokesman for Jaquet Droz. "But there haven't been major technological leaps in the mechanics of the wristwatch. So, they focused on dials." The company makes models with complex tourbillon mechanisms, which are priced at more than \$300,000. But unlike others in that market niche, it offers no crystal window to

peek into the inner workings. "Jaquet Droz is one of only a few who don't show it," Panetta said. "That gives you a sense of how important the dial is to the DNA of the brand. It is their raison d'être." For Jaquet Droz styles like the Grande Date, the numbered clock face is shrunk and floats on a wide sea of minerals like Spectrolite, a rare form of feldspar. "The fragility of mother-of-pearl, coral and some minerals long limited their use. Until technology caught up to the watchmaker's creative vision, they could not be sawed thin enough to make a dial, which may be less than one millimeter thick. Each cutout, for a day date, a moon phase or other complication, raises the risk of breaking the stone. Experienced craftsmanship is precious. At Jaquet Droz, the name of the chief maker of mineral dials is a commercial secret, to prevent competitors from luring him away. The company, now part of the Swatch group, introduced a Classic Stones line in 2004 at prices starting from 28,000 Swiss francs, or \$23,500, using unusual minerals to define the character of the watch, and by extension, its wearer. "The stones represent the company's basic philosophy and an emotional link to infinity," said Jaquet Droz's chief executive, Manuel Emch. Onyx is sleek and simple, rutile quartz is "very 3-dimensional," and Spectrolite displays depth through its rainbow of

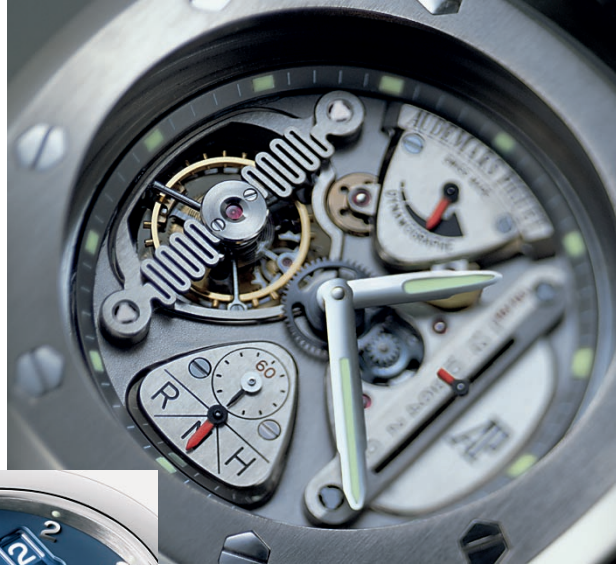
colors, Emch said. Other stones in the range include Meteorite — extracted from comets fallen to earth — and, most recently, Nummite, a rare volcanic stone that was discovered in Greenland in 1982 and is one of the oldest known minerals. Jaquet Droz also makes custom watches for people who want to be involved in the design. For a French paleontologist, the company produced a dial of petrified dinosaur bone. Other dials have been produced from whalebone, a stone from a customer's local mine and prehistoric algae. "It sounds bizarre, but it's the oldest organism known in the world, 3.5 billion years old," said Panetta, the spokesman. "A watch is a part of you. It hugs you every day and is a statement of personal expression. 'Who am I?' it asks. 'Am I wearing a meteorite watch and reaching for the stars? A nummite watch, which says I am more grounded and substantial and of this world? An obsidian watch, dark and mysterious, and you have to scratch the surface to get to know me?'"

Tired: Courtesy of Camilla Dietz Bergeron

Deep appeal in Call of the Deep

By Sonia Kolesnikov-Jessop

SINGAPORE
Since the sextant and the marine chronometer displaced the quadrant and the astrolabe as navigators' instruments in the 18th century, mariners have relied on precision mechanical watches to sail the world for more than 200 years. With the advent of GPS technology and quartz, marine chronometers have been relegated to the status of museum pieces; but their legacy lives on in the popularity of chronometer wristwatches for leisure sailors. Production of marine-related watches has become big business, and nearly all the luxury watchmaking brands have set aside a significant budget to develop their marine lines. Paradoxically, many of their wearers are unlikely to be found on yacht decks, let alone at sea. "Marine-related watches appeal to owners who want to project that he leads a sporting life or is involved in tough and rugged activities, a male ego thing," said Bernard Cheong, a medical practitioner in Singapore identified by the magazine Chronos Japan this month as one of the most influential watch collectors in the world. The appeal is strong even in parts of the world where sailing and other marine sports have a relatively short history. "There is definitely a lot of keen interest for marine watches in Asia even though Asians are not really sailors," said Caz Lee of S.A. Desco Singapore, a distributor for Arnold & Sons, once the London-based maker of the first pocket chronometer and the leading supplier to Britain's Royal Navy — now owned by a private Anglo-Swiss company and based in La Chaux-de-Fonds, hub of the Swiss watchmaking industry. "Consumers nowadays are looking for something unique and exclusive," Lee said. "A watch says a lot about the wearer's personality and consumers do not simply buy a watch to tell time anymore." For Cheong, the male penchant for macho timepieces is like owning a sports car, or big bike, which they drive at less than a third of its potential. "Strictly speaking," he said, "the classifications of 'marine' are largely fashion or marketing tools." Recounting a recent experience of a visit aboard the U.S. aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan, Cheong said he had met for several hours with the ship's divers and air crew. "The watches they use daily were 90 percent Casio G Shock and 10 percent others, Seiko and Citizen. There was not a single Swiss mechanical watch used as standard equipment." "No diver will risk his Rolex, Breguet or Ulysse Nardin underwater," he said. "He would be too scared of scratching it." Ulysse Nardin is a brand that illustrates the transition from working chronometer to luxury wristwatch. So famous were its deck clocks for their reliability that its M.G.R.F. marine chronometers were formerly used by all the major navies of the world. "We only discovered recently that even the Japanese Imperial Navy was using replicas of the M.G.R.F. made by Seiko," said Rolf Schnyder, the company's president. It was not until the company's 150th anniversary, in 1996, that Ulysse Nardin produced its first marine chronometer wristwatch. "If you look at the dial of our marine chronometer watches, it's the exact design of the historic marine chronometer deck clocks," Schnyder said. "The placement of the subseconds indicator, the indices and hands — all of this is exactly the same, to forge a connection with our past." The company may have been late to take the plunge into the leisure market, but it aims to set future trends. While all marine chronometer watches so far have been designed to be worn by men, Schnyder said that Ulysse Nardin would present the first marine-chronometer for women at the Basel watch fair in April, along with the prototype of a new large marine watch in titanium for men. "The use of titanium is one of the trends in marine-related watches, although some men find the metal too light. They want something heavier to give them a feeling of value for money," he said.



The Ulysse Nardin Caliber 160, left, mimics the design of the deck chronometers that used to equip the naval fleets of many countries. The Audemars Piguet Concept Royal Oak, above, has the functionality of a seagoing watch; but few wearers are likely to subject it to offshore rigors.



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