



In **HAUTE HORLOGERIE**, the dial is often a canvas—an expression of beauty and craftsmanship that comes together in a functional product. And there are many types of art found on dials (and cases), representing a wide range of talent. Artisans work side by side with watchmakers to create masterpieces on a small canvas.





Indeed the art of the dial comes in many forms: enamel, cloisonné, gem setting, mosaics, marquetry, sculpture and a host of combinations thereof. What's more, the artists who conceive and create these dials work tirelessly for hundreds and hundreds of hours, often with microscopes and tiny tools to achieve their goals: an expression of singularity and beauty.



ENAMEL/CLOISONNÉ

ENAMEL WORK IS ONE of the most time-honored traditions in watchmaking art. It requires a skilled and steady hand, and a deep knowledge of the colors and the firing process. Enamel starts with glass, ground to a powder that a painter then mixes with oil for the perfect consistency.

Every watch dial undergoes multiple paintings and firings in a kiln—where it is subjected to extreme heat and the possibility of paint bubbles, cracks, dust or even breakage, all of which render it useless. To achieve the depth of color or translucence a painter wants can require several to dozens of paintings—layer upon layer—often with a single-hair paintbrush.

Among the different styles of enameling are grand feu, cloisonné (with strips of gold outlining the design), champlevé, flinqué and spangle (with gold foil sunken in to the enamel). Each is as mesmerizing as the next. Among the masters at enamel work are Vacheron Constantin, Cartier, Van Cleef & Arpels and Ulysse Nardin.

MOSAICS/MARQUETRY

THE WORLD OF MOSAICS and marquetry is intricate, as elements are hand placed one by one—often hundreds of elements—on a single dial. The time it takes to create these dials is enormous, and the craftsmanship tedious but rewarding. As such, each marquetry or mosaic dial existing in the world is a one-of-a-kind piece, or one of an extremely limited edition. Generally mosaics are a compilation of tiny stones, or of pieces of mother of pearl.





Cartier is a master at mosaics, with the amazing tortoise motif unveiled last year and the stunning Santos-Dumont XL watch released this year with a wonderful white horse motif.

In the case of marquetry, the design is often made using inlaid pieces of wood. New to the world of watchmaking this year is the ancient art of straw marquetry—wherein the entire dial is made of individual strands of straw. Again, Cartier excels here; this year it released a stunning koala bear motif.

Similarly, the house of Hermes unveils striking new straw dials this year. This ancient technique of straw splitting, varnishing and in-laid patterning is extremely rare, and more so among watchmakers.

To produce these dials, rye straw is selected and colored. Then the straw is split open with a razor, flattened with a tool of bone and the wisps are cut, put into place and assembled on the dial—all a very time-consuming, tedious process. The Hermes Arceau Marqueterie de Paille watch, shown to the world

“WOMEN APPRECIATE THE POETIC DIMENSION; THEY ENJOY THE MOVEMENT OF THE WATCH AND THE MINIATURE REALITY”

in Basel in March, features an alluring round Arceau case with a marquetry dial made of straw in shades of blue and black in checked and chevron motifs.

SCULPTURE & GEM SETTING

AS WATCHMAKERS SEEK OUT new forms of dial artistry in their desire to capture hearts around the world, they continually turn to different crafts. Several brands turn to sculpture, which on a watch dial is all about carving and engraving gold, platinum and other precious metals to form a figure either as the dial or as an adornment on a dial.

Sometimes a sculpted dial means forming an entire bracelet as a piece of sculpture and the gem setting the entire piece. Indeed, the power of gems and diamonds is exhausting and exhilarating at the same time. Watch brands that have learned to effectively harness that power and have created intricate, sculpted and gem-set dials and bracelets benefit from a true collector following.

For instance, in its popular Limelight Garden Party collection, Piaget carves birds on branches in 18-karat gold. The birds, adorned in diamonds, rest on the watch dial with diamond leaves surrounding them. Audemars Piguet and Harry Winston have created floral sculpted bracelets of diamonds, with a variety of amazing dial treatments ranging from



a mother-of-pearl dial with pave' diamonds in cascading designs, to floral secret watches

Van Cleef & Arpels achieves its sculpturing with a variety of forms, including carving its haute joaillerie watch bracelets into

free forms such as vines, flowers and even animals. In my *Jewels of Time* book, Nicolas Bos, the firm's president and CEO, as well as its worldwide creative director, says, "Women appreciate the poetic dimension; they enjoy the movement of the watch and the miniature reality."

One such miniature reality—just unveiled this year at BaselWorld—comes from the legendary French house of Boucheron—internationally renowned for its intriguing haute joaillerie creations. This year, the brand again indulges its creativity and imagination in stunning timepieces that capture and recreate nature at its best. Among the year's finest examples just is the firm's Cypris Tourbillon (black), housing a Girard-Perrégaux Tourbillon with Three Gold Bridges movement—ensconced in diamonds and gemstones. It's the ultimate marriage of high jewelry and high watchmaking.

On the Cypris Tourbillon is the body of the Cypris bird, and on it is



a watch dial that clearly displays the Three Gold Bridges Tourbillon escapement. The Cypris rests its bejeweled head on the diamond bezel of the watch and spreads its gemstone feathers around it—forming a shimmering bracelet of diamonds and gemstones.

The base plate of the movement is meticulously set with 146 black spinels, 20 blue sapphires and 12 purple sapphires forming the back plate for the Three Gold Bridges. The bracelet—which consists of the Cypris' elegant neck, slightly cocked head and feathers galore—is bedecked with 852 gems, including 290 blue round sapphires, 138 purple round sapphires, 313 black round spinels, 190 round diamonds, 2 blue sapphire oval cabochons, 1 coral (for above the beak) and 1 carved onyx piece as the beak.

Yes, today's watchmakers have found a way to move from craftsmen to artists—eloquently and elegantly. ☺



ROBERTA NAAS' NEW BOOK, *Jewels of Time* (published by Farameh Media) features 300 pages of artistic women's watches. In the book Naas explores the expressive and artistic dials created by watchmakers and their artisans from all over the world.

THE HERMES ARCEAU MARQUETERIE DE PAILLE FEATURES A STRAW MARQUETRY DIAL