

Watchmakers create time pieces for elite



The world's thinnest watch is set in a gold coin (Photographed by Craig Newman)

By CHRISTINE WALDEN

If you've ever wondered what happened to the little old Swiss watchmaker, you can stop wondering. Audemars Piquet has about 150 of them working under one roof and making the world's most expensive watch.

Audemars Piquet, which proudly caters to an exclusive clientele, was formed in 1875. Since then their watches have earned the reputation as the most beautiful and the most expensive in the world.

And with diamond studded hands and price tags that start at \$3,000 and go up, up, up to \$35,000, it's no wonder. But what makes a \$3,000 or a \$35,000 watch tick? According to Jerry Sillman, Audemars Piquet area marketing representative, "Only a watchmaker can really appreciate what goes into the watch."

EVERY PIECE is handmade and only one watchmaker works on a specific watch. "There's a taste, exclusivity, snob appeal if or other dials add to the expensive. Add real gem faces, solid gold, and various other decorations and the cost adds up."

The Grande Complication, the \$35,000 watch which sold for \$25,000 last year and keeps track of everything including moon phases and leap years, is the baby of the Audemars Piquet collection. A 70-year-old watchmaker spends three years making all the pieces and assembling them for the final product. "When he dies we don't know what we will do," said Sillman.

But in spite of the expert craftsmanship and the appreciation of it by watchmakers, few watchmakers can afford to buy them. Therefore, it isn't necessarily the inner workings that appeal to the Audemars Piquet wearer. "It's really a matter of style, taste, exclusivity, snob appeal of you will," said Sillman. "We are catering to a very selective audience who want perfection and want the watch to go from generation to generation."

The Grand Complication primarily goes to museums. Audemars Piquet will never be mass distributed. "We only make 10,000 a year and we sell all of them. They can't become more popular because they

are so limited. They will never be Fords, they will always be a Rolls Royce."

There is another exclusive list connected with Audemars Piquet, the dealers. And recently George Ohrenstein of Southfield, one of the few watchmakers who sells Audemars Piquet, opened his shop for a viewing of the extravagant time pieces.

And according to Sillman, only an expert watchmaker can distribute the watch.

"The dealers have to be able to service them. At one time owners had to send the watch back to Switzerland. When George announced he was a dealer about 40 or 50 Audemars Piquet owners contacted him."

Sillman added that of the 25,000 jewelry dealers in the area, only 150 of them sell Audemars Piquet. If titles are still important, Audemars Piquet has another as the

maker of the world's thinnest watch. Set in a real gold coin, the watch is practically paper thin.

If the expertise of the watch can't be appreciated, the beauty can. Tiger eyes, onals, iade, lanis or other dials adds to the expensive look of the watch. Faces are trimmed with diamonds or perfectly set into mesh bands. Other dials are clear, allowing the full view of the movements.

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