

A Plus Buyer's Guide: Women's Timepieces

There was something that set her apart. Something, some detail that accented her poise, her elegance, her confidence. She was beautiful, yes. But that wasn't it. Even out of the corner of my eye, I was aware of *something* that made her stand out in the sea of faces in that room, something I could not put my finger on. I glanced over to see if she was wearing a wedding band or ring. She was not...and she caught my stare with skeptical blue eyes and raised her eyebrows.

That's when I realized what it was that I had subconsciously registered. She was *wearing a watch*. A gold tonneau, the maker's signature obscured by the distance. An antique? A gift from a lover? Something she bought for herself? I see watches so infrequently that I had to wonder. It added to her fascination, to her allure. I had no choice but to approach her and discreetly inquire.

A well cared for timepiece says so much about the woman who wears it. Grace, an appreciation for beauty, conscientiousness, punctuality, a respect for tradition: all of those things and so much more may be signified by a watch. A chronograph or smartwatch might indicate a goal-driven spirit. An oversized timepiece with a simple dial might reveal a practical heart. A cocktail watch on a satin strap or an antique mechanical reveals elegance and taste, regardless of what else the wearer might have on. The right watch is a singular indicator of the totality of your personal style. It's a signature, your personal hallmark.

Let's help you find that perfect watch. There's some basic nomenclature that's worth understanding so that when you go shopping for a watch, you know exactly what you're getting.

The clear, protective cover on a watch dial--called the display or face on digital and smartwatches--is called the crystal because in good watches, it's made of scratch-resistant synthetic sapphire crystal.

The informal rule used to be that **straps** referred to anything other than metal (e.g., leather, canvas, plastic, silicone) bands to secure the watchcase to your wrist. The two terms are now generally understood to be interchangeable. HOWEVER...That does not mean the two methods are interchangeable. Certain watchmakers make their watches with lugs that can only accept bands or straps made by their company. Moreover, some make it impossible to replace or change straps by yourself. That can make a broken strap or band a bit of a problem if you're nowhere near a retailer that carries spare parts or if your watch is discontinued.

The knob that is used to adjust the time on a watch with hands is called the **crown** and it's attached to the **stem**. Crowns come in two types: pull-out and

screw-down. Pull-out crowns have one drawback: it's very easy to chip a nail on a pull-out crown. Make sure you can easily pull the crown out. Always make sure you push or screw it back in after setting the time or date, otherwise, you run the risk of moisture entering the movement.

Complications are the additional features on a mechanical or automatic watch. These include day/date, moon phase, and similar functions, but may also include extremely technical grand complications like perpetual calendars that take leap years into account, hyper-accurate floating tourbillons in intricate cages, and minute repeaters that ring out the time with minuscule, purely mechanical chimes. **Grand complications** are all done by hand and can take hundreds of hours to assemble. All complications controlled by either pulling the crown out to various positions (e.g., for the hour hand, minute hand, and date) or with various buttons set into the side of the case.

"Water-resistant" does not mean your watch can be submerged in water. It only refers to their ability to get accidentally wet: think "spilled drink" rather than "thrown in the pool." Despite what the water resistant ratings might say, the only watches suitable for submersion--swimming, snorkeling, bathing--are those that are rated for 10 or more atmospheres (10ATM): that's 330 feet or 100 meters. For diving, you'll want 20 ATM or higher: rated to 200 meters or more. On higher rated models and deeper dives look for rotating bezels--to keep track of dive time, you move the 0 on the bezel to wherever the minute hand is when you dive and read the numbers on the bezel...you don't want a bezel that's going to accidentally roll backwards) and large markers on the dial. Depth and temperature gauges are a nice touch, too.

One of the trends that I - and watch manufacturers - have noticed is the continued popularity of round watches with large cases, simple complications (generally chronographs: stopwatches), and inexpensive but eye-catching ornamentation like crystal accents or markers, mother of pearl dials, or ceramic bands. While I'm all for this kind of watch, it's always worth thinking of options that don't follow trends.

One of the most intriguing things about women's timepieces is the abundance of unconventional designs. Double wrap straps are just one way of adding texture and dimension. Elaborate bracelets can make for dramatic statements, while bangles or cuffs are a playful alternative to straps or bands. Studs and spikes have been *everywhere* in women's fashion over the last three or four years and while they can be overdone, when executed subtly they create versatile options for day and night looks.

Smaller, classic styles can be found at better jewelers and stores. The narrow baguette style on a silk strap is dainty and elegant on slender wrists, as is the

barrel-shaped tonneau, especially with diamond or gemstone accents. Cocktail watches, often covered in pavé diamonds and on black satin straps are exquisite nighttime pieces, but may also be worn during the day: a more colorful strap--anything but black or white--helps keep them from looking gauche.

Certain novelty watches add a touch of fun to your every day accessories. Look for watches that securely clip or clasp to your handbag handle. Small timepieces that attach to charm bracelets create a young, playful look. A very basic three-hand watch looks great with interchangeable canvas or grosgrain ribbon straps in your school or sorority colors...or whatever suits your fancy.

As for the woman with the watch, well, the rest of that story is ours. She makes every day we spend together the best of times.