

This and facing pages: on average, a basic strap takes Low three to four hours to complete and his annual production for watch straps is just over 500.

HANDMADE WITH LOVE

Local leather artisan Hughes Low crafts watch straps that befit the technical marvels they hold.

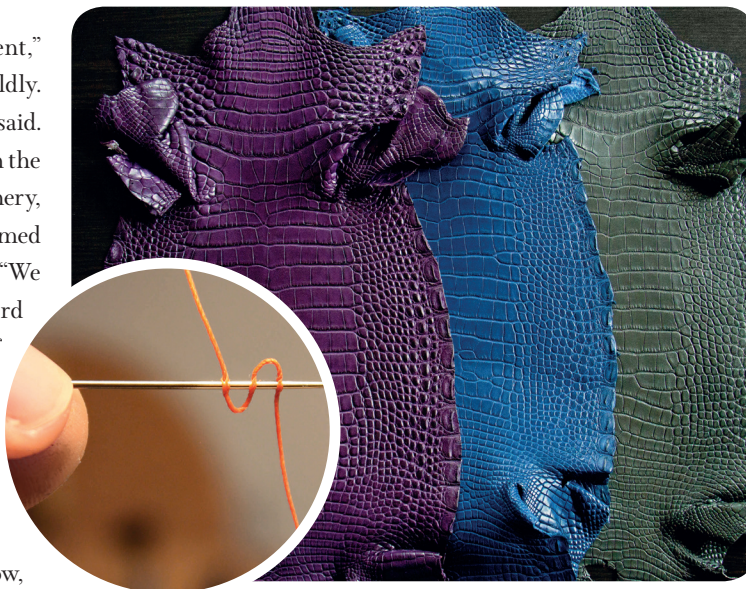
By HO YUN KUAN

Photos JAE HANN



“I have an appointment,” Hughes Low lied boldly. “No, you don’t,” they said. Low had turned up on the doorstep of a local tannery, unannounced and definitely unwelcomed – he had called earlier only to be told: “We don’t sell to hobbyists.” Low’s third trip finally yielded his first piece of leather: a brown alligator measuring 25cm across at its widest point, the smallest size available and the only one he could afford then at \$700.

That was about five years ago, when leather craft was a hobby that Low,



Low added watch straps to his repertoire two years ago.

then an undergraduate, indulged in. He sold small leather goods to buyers he found on forums. After graduating, he worked for six months as a quantity surveyor to build up enough capital to start Hughes Handcrafted. During his stint as a quantity surveyor, Low considered attending Ecole Gregoire-Ferrandi in Paris, which trains leather craftsmen for Hermes. “But the fees were too expensive. I would also have to spend a year learning French before enrolling because the classes are taught in French,” he recalls. “I asked if I could do e-learning instead. They were kind enough to link me up with an English-speaking teacher and not charge any fees!”

Low added watch straps to his repertoire two years ago, when a veteran watch journalist asked him to create a brown alligator strap for his rose gold Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso. Today, on top of a steady string of private collectors, Low also makes straps for independent brands and local retailer The Hour Glass. When *Robb Report* spoke to him, Low was busy completing 25 straps for Romain Jerome’s limited-edition Spacecraft Black. hughes-handcrafted.tumblr.com

MORE STRAPPING LADS

France is home to some of the world’s best leather artisans, including the two below.

Camille Fournet – Now helmed by Jean-Luc Dechery, this brand was founded by Fournet in 1945.

Most popular style: Brown or black alligator lined with calfskin.

Most unusual request: A white alligator strap to be completed and shipped within 48 hours.

The pedigree: Each strap takes more than 50 steps to finish and to fully master the entire process would take a craftsman 10 to 15 years. To ensure the best quality, each employee specialises in just one or two steps.

Jean Rousseau – With a staff strength of 300, this atelier boasts control over all aspects of production.

Most popular style: Cut edge (the leather is cut instead of folded over to form the edge) strap in alligator with rubber lining.

Most unusual request: A strap in chicken leg skin.

The pedigree: The brand prefers to hire those who have been educated in leather craft, textile work or art.