

HAUTE HOROLOGY

Kathryn Conway explores the extraordinary timepieces that are created when the worlds of haute couture and haute horlogerie collide



Many have tried, but there are still only a handful of luxury brands more traditionally associated with fashion that have succeeded in getting the stamp of approval from the stalwarts of Swiss watchmaking. This is no more apparent than at the Fondation de la Haute Horlogerie (FHH), a body that promotes the excellence and the tradition of watchmaking, with membership criteria laid down by the experts that make up its Cultural Council. Last year, the FHH published a white paper in a bid to define the very notion of fine watchmaking – only Chanel, Hermès, Louis Vuitton and Montblanc, names originally founded on craftsmanship outside the worlds of watches and fine jewellery, were deemed fit to join the list of powerhouse brands. However, while these companies might not have centuries of watchmaking prowess behind them, they're establishing themselves as serious players in the market, producing timepieces that even die-hard enthusiasts of haute horlogerie covet.





CHANEL PREMIÈRE CAMÉLIA SKELETON

It was no surprise that Chanel's Première Camélia Skeleton timepiece received one of the highest accolades in Swiss watchmaking, scooping the Ladies' Watch prize at last year's Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève. This carefully crafted beauty houses Chanel's second in-house movement, the Calibre 2, which has been constructed in such a way as to resemble one of the touchstones of the maison – the camellia flower. Unusually, the unique design of the bridges of this skeletonised movement was envisaged by Chanel's studio team in Paris before the technical whizzes at Châtelain, the Chanel-owned Swiss watchmaking manufacturer, were let loose on the movement's development. If fitting components into the petals of a flower wasn't challenging enough, two iterations of the watch feature diamond-set white-gold bridges – a technical feat that underlines how extraordinary this beautiful movement is.

DIOR GRAND BAL FÊTE DU PRINTEMPS

This celebration of spring by Dior takes inspiration from the exquisite workmanship of early miniaturists. The dial features mother-of-pearl marquetry set with diamonds and rubies and is embellished with yellow-gold elements giving the watch a Far Eastern aesthetic – fitting, as this limited edition of 88 pieces was designed to celebrate the 2018 Chinese New Year. The Inversé 11 1/2 calibre automatic movement is highly impressive – exclusive to Dior, it features a functional oscillating weight that takes the form of a decorative fan. The resulting timepiece combines the cornerstones of great design – effective engineering, beautiful styling and superb functionality.

HERMÈS ARCEAU CHRONO TITANE

The latest incarnation of Hermès' classic Arceau design – first created by Henri d'Origny in 1978 – sees the timepiece take on a sportier flavour, with the addition of a chronograph function and a bead-blasted titanium case. It retains its delicate styling, while the Barenia calfskin strap and stirrup-shaped side lugs give a nod to the equestrian world. The Arceau is waterproof to three bar (or 30 metres), more than adequate for recreational scuba diving, and has a Swiss-made movement built with 37 jewels, which provides a 42-hour power reserve. But it's the styling where the Arceau truly wins; the galvanic black face is softened by the Arabic numerals in white, and even though the timepiece has to accommodate two counters, a chronograph and small date function, it still manages to look smart and unfussy.