

Watch Keepers

Michael Franco profiles five magnificent watches that celebrate the proud association between chronometers and navigating the world's oceans ...

In today's world, fine timepieces are considered a luxury, but for sailors plying the seas in the 1800's, a sturdy and trustworthy chronometer was a necessity. At that time, using the readout from a chronometer and comparing it with the time at a known longitude like London, Paris or Greenwich, was the only sure way of pinpointing a ship's longitude. Accuracy of these time tellers under a variety of climatic and spatial challenges was crucial, as a difference of just a single second could mean a navigational error of 463 metres while sailing at the equator.

Horologists have never forgotten the link between their craft and the sea as is evident in this selection of exquisite nautically themed watches ...



AUDEMARS PIGUET ROYAL OAK DIVER

For the first time since it was introduced in 1972, the Audemars Piguet Royal Oak watch has received a makeover as a serious dive watch. The distinctive octagonal shape and polished hexagonal screws remain, but most other embellishments have been stripped away. The result is a powerful, masculine timepiece that looks like it can handle the rough conditions of the sea—which it, in fact, can. It is saltwater resistant to 300 metres (three times the Swiss watch industry norm), has an antimagnetic strongbox that protects its movements, is extremely resistant to external forces and drops, and—thanks to a generous use of luminescent coating—is readable from a distance of 25cm in the dark. This resilient self-winder also features a diving scale on an inner rotating dial that can only be turned by deliberately unscrewing the crown—a feature that provides absolute accuracy.

ROLEX YACHT MASTER II

With the world's first programmable countdown feature employing a mechanical memory, this is a true regatta Rolex. Not only can the countdown be set anywhere from ten minutes and under using a brand-new Ring Command bezel, it can be further synchronized during a race's starting sequences and locked in place, if desired. In addition to this industry-leading complication, the watch also features a new movement known as the 4160 calibre, which consists of 360 individual components. As shown here, the case is forged from 18-carat yellow gold with a blue ceramic disc engraved with the numerals. The time teller is also available in 18-carat white gold with raised numerals on a platinum ring.



BREGUET MARINE 5847BB

Breguet have a long association with timepieces sent to sea, as founder A. L. Breguet (b. 1747) was the official chronometer-maker for the French navy. While the latest release in their Marine series may look more like a decorative piece of jewellery than hard-working timepiece, it is actually as sea ready as those French frigates were in times past, thanks to a water-resistancy of 300 metres. The triangular hand in the centre of the dial is used for setting the alarm, which can be done with the push-piece located at 4 o'clock and is indicated by a small window at 12 o'clock. Of course that's not to say that this fine time-teller isn't a wonderful piece of jewellery; it's available in white or rose gold with a black dial, or as shown here in 18-carat white gold.



CORUM ADMIRAL'S CUP CHRONOGRAPH 44 CENTRO MONO-PUSHER

The actual Admiral's Cup regatta may be 53 years old this year, but the Admiral's Cup watch crafted by Corum just marked its 50th anniversary. To celebrate, the Swiss horologists created this black beauty. Keeping the buttons to a minimum is a mono-pusher—one button that stops, starts and resets the chronograph. The case—which houses a face adorned with Côtes de Genève striping and a bezel bedecked with lacquered nautical pennants—is made from ultralight grade-five titanium dressed in matt black PVD coating (physical vapour deposition). This bestows a hardness that reaches an impressive 1300 on the Vickers scale, making it harder than steel. It is water resistant to 100 metres, self-winding and being released in a limited quantity of just 555 pieces—a tribute to another milestone in Corum's history: their own 55-year birthday.

