

The craftsman who upcycles pocket watches

Design

Hungarian
Lorant Tamas recasts forgotten pieces for a new life on the wrist, writes Valerie Hopkins

In a sleepy town near Hungary's Lake Balaton, some 140km south west of Budapest, a watch enthusiast is adapting century-old pocket watches for today's wrists.

Five years ago, jeweller Lorant Tamas decided that the Longines pocket watch that had his great-grandfather bought more than a century ago ought to be worn instead of languishing in a drawer. The watch had been in the family through two world wars, the Soviet occupation of Hungary, and now 30 years of democracy, but for much of its existence it was either hidden or put away somewhere.

"I love these types of watches because I love the idea that it carries the history of the family," says Mr Tamas, sitting around a traditional kitchen table at his homestead in the village of Tokaji, where his wife runs a B&B. Out of the corner of his eye, he watches his horses grazing outside, overseen by a motley duo of a Puli (Hungarian mop dog) and a Weimaraner.

He says he wanted to help people feel closer to their ancestors through reviving their possessions for use today. "You have an heirloom that you have to look after, but it is not fulfilling its function."

Mr Tamas was trained in both jewellery and metalwork and most recently worked for himself, so he already had the skills to act on his desire to rescue his great-grandfather's watch from an eternity in a drawer or locked box. He removed its cover and created a new gold case for it and a panoramic glass face for its underside, exposing the beautifully laid out gears. He attached leather straps. His large watch was a hit with everyone who saw it, and soon word of his creation had spread to other people.

Mr Tamas, 51, began resetting watches for wear for paying customers under the brand Tamas Lorant, a slight twist on his name. He started updating the watches of acquaintances and customers, and also began looking for watches at markets and online that he could recast and sell on to other enthusiasts.

Each timepiece is unique, and Mr Tamas prefers the ones that come with a story. For most of the watches, which start at €25,000, the original gears work well after some servicing. For a treasured but damaged Zenith pocket watch brought to him by one customer, he had to build a new watch face out of porcelain. He did so much work to restore the rest of the watch that it took one year – a process that would usually take him about six months, he says.

During the two world wars and especially the resource-deprived communist era, so many gold and silver pocket-watches were melted down for the metal, he says regretfully.



"From my career as a goldsmith, I know that often jewellers, if they came across a pocket watch, they'd smash it, put it in a bucket, and just take the gold itself," Mr Tamas says.

Though most of the watches he works with are in very good condition, he has also given himself some challenges. He produced a photo of a watch face missing its small hand but in its original A.

"I don't want to remake the mechanism, I want to restore it to its former glory"

Lang & Son's box. A hunched old lady had brought it in, convinced it was still worth something, even though the gold frame had been sold off by her family during tougher times. Mr Tamas marvelled at the quality of the craftsmanship that meant all of the gears still worked perfectly.

"It is important to me to be able to save watches from a bad fate, and I enjoy the professional challenge," he says.

Mr Tamas says he works only with gold frames, whether they be white, rose, pink or yellow gold. For each watch, he needs to create three unique, separate pieces to fit around the glass frame. Then he attaches a luxurious watch band made of rare materials like crocodile leather or stingray skin.

Mr Tamas says he tries to preserve the original structure as much as possible. The winding crown of the watch is usually situated at the 12 or 3 o'clock position and must be wound every 25 hours, as with a traditional pocket watch.

"I don't want to remake the mechanism, I want to restore it to its former glory, so that if someone in the next generations says they want it to be restored as a pocket watch, they still can," he says.

By the end of the process Mr Tamas has made the watch his own, he says. "I am not simply selling a Patek Philippe or a Longines, but a Tamas Lorant bespoke watch with a unique mechanism." Each watch comes with a certificate and a two-year warranty.

While initially the technical challenge was one of the main draws for Mr Tamas, now he enjoys feeling connected to the family stories through timepieces.

"It is great to produce the watches, but I am at the stage where I enjoy the stories that come with the watches as much as I enjoy creating them. What I am looking for is pieces that connect me to a really interesting family story or a famous personality from history."

Mr Tamas has now produced about 25 watches for clients all over the world, including many Asian businessmen.

He produced another timepiece with a Patek Philippe mechanism at the end of 2018, this one with a crocodile strap. The watch had been owned by an employee of the legendary Lingotto Fiat factory in Turin, known for having its test track on the roof of the building.

This watch, says Mr Tamas, had been used during the mid 1930s by a top Fiat employee to time the cars as they whizzed along the one-kilometre track. Its second hand measured the time it took to make a full revolution on the track, to make sure the speed was at least 50 kilometres an hour. Mr Tamas still possesses the watch but has put it up for sale.

The story of this watch is particularly special for Mr Tamas because of its symbolism. The Lingotto was rendered obsolete in the 1970s, shortly after being featured in the iconic film *The Italian Job*, and the factory was subsequently shut down. The building, its legendary rooftop racetrack still intact, has since found new life as a cultural hub. So too, has the watch that once clocked the Fiats on its roof.

Barbara Taylor Bradford sale is write on the money

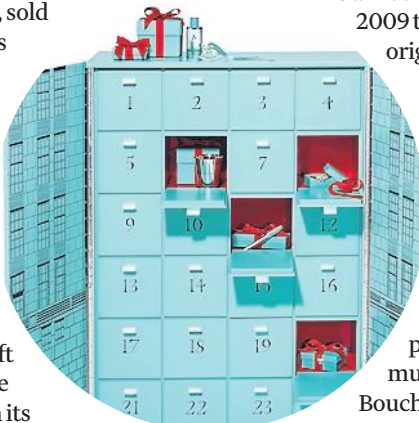
Fifteen pieces of jewellery belonging to bestselling British-American novelist Barbara Taylor Bradford are being sold at auction on December 4.

Part of Bonhams' London Jewels sale, the pieces include a white enamel and gem set cuff bangle by Verdura, estimate £20,000-£30,000, which is number 65 in a limited edition of 70. Other jewels from the author's collection in the auction include a pair of rose-cut diamond earrings by David Morris, estimate £6,000-£8,000, and a Verdura multi-gem set cross pendant, estimate £10,000-£15,000.

The writer's debut novel, 1979's *A Woman of Substance*, sold more than 30m copies worldwide.

Bingle bells

Tiffany has created an advent calendar that features jewels from its collections behind each window. One of the four 4ft x 2ft calendars made by the jeweller will be sold in its



Plug for a jeweller

Boucheron is adding new, fully jewel-encrusted pieces to the multifunctional Jack de Boucheron collection it

Fifth Avenue flagship store in New York, another at a Tiffany gift emporium in Harrods, London.

The \$112,000 calendar features jewellery including a pair of \$9,000 Tiffany Paper Flowers diamond and tanzanite drop earrings, and a \$14,000 Tiffany City HardWear 18-carat rose gold large link bracelet.

Necklace that could be your undoing

Phillips is offering a rare diamond, sapphire and lapis lazuli Zip necklace by Van Cleef & Arpels in its Jewels and Jadeite auction in Hong Kong on November 25.

The sought-after design, introduced by the jeweller in the 1950s, can be worn unzipped as a necklace or zipped as a bracelet. Legend has it that the Duchess of Windsor suggested designing jewellery based on a zip in 1958.

The necklace being sold – estimate HK\$3.5m-4.5m (£350,000-£450,000) – is a modern jewel bought in 2009 that honours the original concept.

launched this year.

The jewellery, inspired by a headphone jack, can be worn as a bracelet, necklace, belt or headpiece. Unlike most designs, the focus is on the clasp.

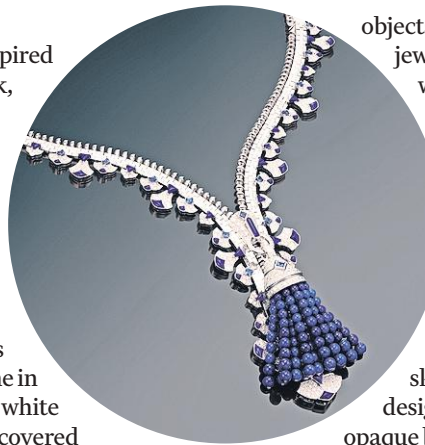
The additions to the collection are out at the end of this month and will come in 18-carat yellow and white gold, with the clasp covered with white diamonds.

German style in London

Twelve Hemmerle pieces from a private collection will feature in Sotheby's fine jewels sale in London on November 26. In line with the 126-year-old Munich jeweller's bold style, the one-of-a-kind pieces combine precious gems with metals rarely used in jewellery. These include a pair of lava cameo, copper and coloured diamond earrings; an emerald, hardstone cameo and tsavorite garnet pendant necklace, estimate £15,000-£20,000; and a pair of copper and coloured diamond earrings inspired by a Matisse sculpture, estimate £20,000-£30,000.

Nature of time

Van Cleef & Arpels is holding its first exhibition in Italy this month. More than 400 jewellery pieces, watches and



objects made by the high jewellery house since it was founded in 1906 will be on display in the Van Cleef & Arpels: Time, Nature, Love exhibition at Palazzo Reale in Milan from November 30.

Documents, sketches and gouache designs (those that use an opaque body of colour) from the archives are also included. The show's themes are explored through pieces from the Van Cleef & Arpels Collection and loans from private collections.

In Vogue

Christie's Magnificent Jewels sale in Geneva on November 12 includes 28 lots of jewellery by Pierre Sterlé.

The pieces, the property of a lady of title, include a citrine and diamond necklace and ring set, estimate SFr40,000-60,000 (£31,000-47,000), worn by French actress Claude Nollier in an issue of *Vogue* in 1953. A 1960s lapis lazuli, coral and diamond bird of paradise brooch for Chaumet, estimate SFr20,000-SFr30,000, is also up for sale and showcases the French jeweller's angel wire technique.

Movie magic

Bulgari is staging a pop-up boutique inspired by the magic of cinema in

Harrods, London, until January 7. The temporary space features pieces from the brand's Cinemagia high jewellery collection and the exclusive pre-launch of a set of diamond jewellery from the Forever collection ahead of its global unveiling next month. With a design inspired by a four-petal flower prized by the Romans, the set comprises a pair of pendant earrings, a necklace and a ring. All are 18-carat white gold and feature round brilliant-cut diamonds and pavé diamonds.

Things That I Love

The second instalment of the Louisa Guinness Gallery's Things That I Love exhibition will display vintage and contemporary jewellery by lesser known and emerging designers, as well as pieces that result from the gallery's collaborations with established artists. The London gallery usually only shows jewellery by painters and sculptors. Its latest exhibition, open November 20 to December 20, will feature jewellers who reflect the way Ms Guinness works with contemporary artists. All pieces will be for sale.

A diamond education

Diamond experts from De Beers Group will share their knowledge with visitors to

an exhibition in London. Christie's has joined with the diamond company to stage Rare Treasures of the Earth at the auction house's London headquarters in King Street until November 12.

Fancy coloured diamonds are on display alongside rare rocks and minerals. Experts from De Beers will explain what gives the rare stones their colour and show the intricate process of polishing a coloured diamond.

Watch this space

LVMH Moët Hennessy has made a cash bid to acquire Tiffany for \$120 a share. The French luxury goods group – which owns the Bulgari and Chaumet jewellery maisons, as well as watch brands including TAG Heuer and Hublot – announced at the end of last month that it had held "preliminary discussions" with the American jewellery house.

Tiffany confirmed it had received an unsolicited offer, adding that, while the parties were "not in discussions", it was reviewing the proposal with the help of independent financial and legal advisers.

Kate Youde

