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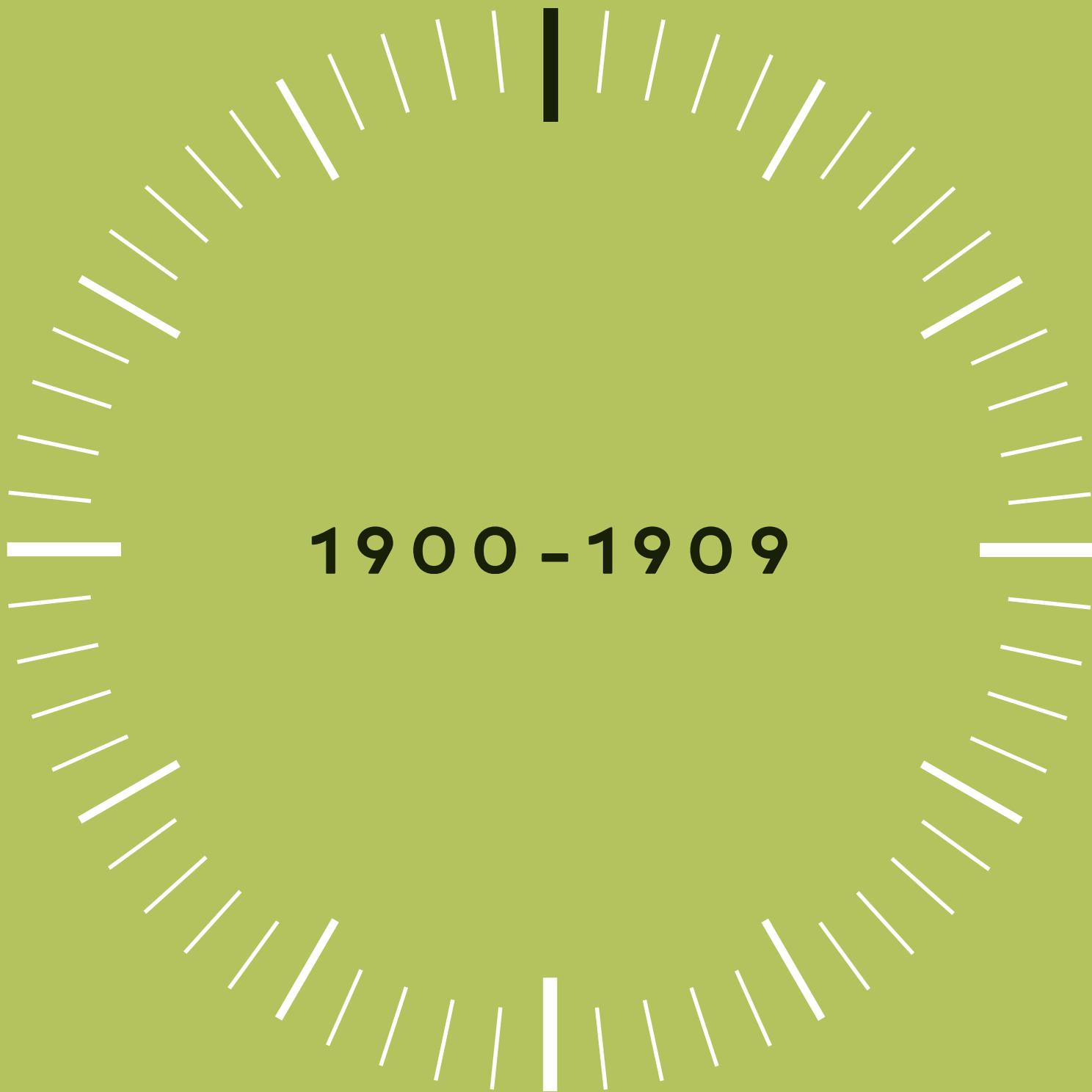
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LA ROCHELLE



1900 - 1909



THE 1900s

The proliferation of the classically styled pocket watch of the early 1900s has rather unfairly tarnished the general perception of this period as one of plain design that occasionally verges towards the dour. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the mass production of cheap yet reliable watches by firms such as Roskopf in Switzerland had, for the first time, placed the portable timepiece within the grasp of almost all members of society.¹ Yet it was techniques developed during the second half of the nineteenth century in the United States that had truly transformed the market, dramatically increasing the availability of affordable, good-quality watches; by 1886, for example, Elgin of Illinois were manufacturing a thousand watch movements per day.² Meanwhile, Waltham, that great behemoth of American watchmaking, had developed technology for the mass production of precision watches that was adapted and adopted by factories in Switzerland, Japan and England.³ In addition to their higher-quality watches, from the late 1870s, some American manufacturers began producing so-called 'dollar'

watches,⁴ their movement plates stamped out of sheet metal and their dials frequently made of paper. As a consequence of the sheer volume of production during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, survival rates of the 'textbook' pocket watch from this era are far higher than for any previous period. The fact that a significant proportion of these follow similar forms and styles has certainly gone a long way to colour the way in which we think about the watch of the early twentieth century.

Yet the watch has always been a diverse creature, never immune to the influence of changing fashions. At the luxury end of the market, watchmakers had collaborated for centuries with enamellers and jewellers to produce timepieces of exceptional beauty. No period of watchmaking could be unaffected by the influence of the decorative arts, and it is therefore unsurprising that the impact of the Belle Époque and Art Nouveau filtered into the watch designs of the early 1900s.

Niello work, chasing and engraving and a wide range of decorative enamel techniques were used during this

BELOW, LEFT Waltham, c. 1908.
A gold-filled open-faced lever watch
(cal. 19¼" size 16)
Diameter 51 mm

BELOW, RIGHT Breguet, c. 1900.
A silver and niello half-hunting-cased
lever watch
Diameter 51 mm

OPPOSITE Patek Philippe, sold in 1902.
A silver open-faced lever watch, the case
back chased and engraved with irises,
daffodils and a dragonfly (cal. 19")
Diameter 51 mm





period. The use of translucent enamel was especially popular, and this was often applied above an engine-turned gold case back to form impressive, wave-like patterns that added a sense of depth and grandeur to a watch. The image below shows an Omega watch made in 1905 that has a case back composed of concentrically chased and engraved borders of laurel wreaths, these naturalistically overlapping the solid green enamel ring that separates them. Surrounding the central medallion, and framed by solid white enamel borders, a turquoise enamel has been applied over an engine-turned ground. This watch has elements of the classical and is certainly heavily influenced by the Belle Époque style. The dial remains traditional, with a decoratively engine-turned centre and a satin-finished chapter ring that carries the black Arabic numerals. Raised, openwork chased decoration also fitted well with the aesthetics of the Art Nouveau movement. In the Patek Philippe watch shown opposite, leaves and branches of mistletoe are naturalistically worked above a case back of enamel

in tones of blue, green and yellow. The mistletoe berries are represented by pearls, and the decoration continues across the case to include the original matching brooch to which the watch is attached.

Traditional decorative techniques that had been used for decades continued to be employed within ornamental schemes. During the first decade of the twentieth century, for example, the London watchmakers Jump & Sons created some exceptionally beautiful pocket watches that paid homage to the style Abraham-Louis Breguet had established in Paris at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries – these included highly finished dials with multiple engine-turned finishes. Illustrated on page 14 is an example of Jump’s work that dates to 1904. The watch has a silver dial with combinations of engine-turned decoration to give depth and contrast to the finish, and the Roman numerals are engraved and filled on a high-sheen, satin-finished chapter ring. Above the twelve o’clock position an aperture shows the phases of the moon, while a smaller window at six o’clock displays the date.

BELOW Omega, made in 1905.
A yellow gold, opaque enamel and translucent guilloché enamel open-faced lever watch
Diameter 51 mm

OPPOSITE Patek Philippe, made in 1900 and retailed by Critzer Bros. of San Antonio, Texas.
An 18 ct yellow gold, enamel and pearl-set pendant lever watch with mistletoe motif and matching brooch (cal. 10’’)
Diameter 27 mm





Although the pocket and pendant styles were the dominant forms of watch during the first decade of the twentieth century, other genres were also available. Lapel watches, for example, could be fitted to a jacket, the dial poking through the button hole while the main body of the watch remained concealed from view. Button and lapel-form watches continued to be popular for a number of years, the majority with plainer cases often made from gunmetal. It was also during these years that the wristwatch began to emerge as a distinct genre of timepiece.

The wristwatch was still not a clearly defined category at the turn of the twentieth century. In general, the application of a bracelet to a watch was a form of decorative enhancement, the bangle or bracelet often being set with enamels, precious stones and pearls, or having decoratively chased and engraved gold panels and links. Almost exclusively the preserve of wealthy women, bracelet watches had appeared intermittently throughout the nineteenth century but were relatively few and far

between, seemingly failing to capture the public imagination. Patek Philippe, for example, produced a bangle-form bracelet watch in 1868, yet the Patek Philippe Archives make no further reference to bracelet or wristwatches until the turn of the century.⁵

The image opposite right shows a yellow gold, platinum and diamond-set bracelet watch that dates to about 1900. An ornate and highly decorative wristwatch, this very much follows the nineteenth-century pattern of the bracelet watch as an object of jewellery, where the timepiece itself is almost incidental. The watch head is of a style similar to decorative pendant watches of the period and was clearly not intended for everyday use. To the bezel are engraved gold floral swags, and these are interspersed with black enamel panels heightened with painted white flowers. The gold bracelet is composed of laurel wreaths interlaced with diamond-set bows and connected by enamel panels with theatrical scenes painted in grisaille. The movement was made by the Swiss watchmaker Henri Sandoz & Fils, while the

BELOW, LEFT Jump, London, hallmarked 1904.

A platinum and gold open-faced lever watch with moon phases and date
Diameter 50 mm

BELOW, RIGHT Golay Fils & Stahl, c. 1900.

An 18 ct pink gold and diamond-set lapel lever watch
Diameter of dial 13 mm, diameter of case 24 mm



BELOW, LEFT Unsigned, c. 1905.
A ladies' platinum, gold, emerald, seed
pearl and diamond-set wristwatch
Total length 140 mm

BELOW, RIGHT Henri Husson and Henri
Sandoz & Fils, c. 1900.
A ladies' yellow gold, platinum, enamel
and diamond-set wristwatch, the bracelet
with panels painted in grisaille
Diameter 26 mm, total length 185 mm



exceptional bracelet and case were executed by the French jeweller and metalworker Henri Husson.

As more women entered the workplace, so the wristwatch became an ever more useful means of tracking time throughout the day. Such wristwatches, intended for a working life, had no need to be overly decorative; being first and foremost objects of utility, they were usually adaptations of small pocket watches. Shown below is a pink gold ladies' wristwatch. Made in Switzerland, the watch was exported to the UK and has English import hallmarks for the year 1909. The design is derived from the small pendant watches that were popular at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries and is of typical half-hunter form. The cover is glazed to the centre, and this is surrounded by a pink guilloché enamel chapter ring with blue enamel Roman numerals and an inner minute track. As the watch is not designed to be suspended from a brooch or chain, there is no pendant or bow. The winding crown is relatively flat but with a knurled edge to allow the watch to be easily wound. Pressing the crown towards the case releases

a catch, causing the cover to spring open to reveal a white enamel dial that is calibrated to the edge with slim black Roman numerals and a red twelve o'clock. To the edge of the dial, the minutes are calibrated in black. The hands are made from blued steel and the hour hand has a double taper; this means that when the cover is closed, the first spade-form taper indicates to the hours engraved in blue to the cover, and when the cover is opened and time viewed on the white enamel dial, the secondary taper at the tip of the hour hand indicates hours to the dial's black Roman numerals. Rather than requiring the crown to be pulled out to adjust the time, the watch incorporates an earlier form of adjustment whereby a fingernail may be inserted to press the small pusher to the case side, just beneath the crown, which itself is protected by rounded shoulders. With this button pressed in, the crown can then be used to turn the hands. To enable a wrist strap to be fitted to the watch, gold wire has been shaped and soldered to the case to form lugs.

While the early 1900s continued to see the wristwatch genre as almost solely designed for women, some

BELOW Swiss, unsigned, with London import hallmarks for 1909.

A 9 ct pink gold half-hunting cased ladies' wristwatch with cylinder movement (cal. 10.5'')
Diameter 27.5 mm



BELOW Swiss, unsigned, c. 1900.
An 18 ct yellow gold ladies' half-hunting
cased cylinder watch
Diameter 32 mm

precedents for men's wristlets had already been set and would develop, albeit very slowly, as the decade advanced. The Swiss maker Girard-Perregaux was among the first to produce wristwatches in series. In 1879, at a trade fair in Berlin, Kaiser Wilhelm I approached Girard-Perregaux to produce a watch that could be fixed to the wrist using a strap. These wristwatches, designed for the Kaiser's naval officers, were to be fitted with a grille over the crystal to protect the glass. Following production of a prototype in 1880, two thousand examples were reportedly ordered. Sadly, none are known to survive, but their description would suggest a style not dissimilar to watches used by soldiers during the First World War.⁶ In 1904, Eterna patented the design of a wristwatch case under Swiss patent 29974.⁷ In the same year, Louis Cartier supplied his pioneering aviator friend Alberto Santos-Dumont with a wristwatch that could be easily used to consult the time while at the controls of his plane. Although no trace of the original survives, it is believed to have been the inspiration for the Santos II, which was developed in 1908 and marketed commercially as the Santos-Dumont

three years later (see image p. 34).⁸ The significance of the Santos lay in the fact that it was specifically designed as a wristwatch – rather than being adapted from a pocket watch – with special 'lugs' that formed an integral part of the case design and held the wrist strap in place.

As the 1900s turned to the 1910s, it was the wristwatch that stood on the cusp of transformation. The advent of the First World War would be the most influential driver of this change by proving the wristlet's practicality to a wider audience. Experimentation with the form and shape of the wristwatch would lead to more decorative and varied dial designs. In Switzerland, the dominance of precision watchmaking had firmly taken root and the Alpine country's reputation for the production of luxury watches was well established. Improved production techniques increased the output of 'complication' watches, placing chronographs, repeaters and calendar watches within reach of a broader clientele.



DECORATING WITH ENAMELS

The enhancement of the watch's case and dial with enamel decoration has a long and rich history, one that is largely dominated by Swiss and French artisans. During the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Switzerland witnessed the rise of spectacular enamel miniaturists, and during the latter part of that century it was an exceptionally talented enamel portraitist, John Graff (1836–1903), who dominated in this field. Executing works for important families throughout Europe and beyond, it is Graff's portraits of the Maharajahs of India that are among the most evocative and captivating of this genre. Naturalistically painted, the portraits of the Maharajahs are often embellished with precious stones, in some cases applied to the necklaces and earrings that the sitters are shown to be wearing.

By the turn of the twentieth century, a broad range of decorative enamel techniques were being employed to enhance the cases of watches. Shown opposite is a gold pocket watch of Art Nouveau design that has an ivory dial and a further ivory panel inset to the case back.

Each panel is painted in muted polychrome enamel tones and depicts classical figures in a freer, almost Pompeian style. The panels are attributed to the French miniaturist Fernand Paillet (1850–1918). A pupil of Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse, Paillet's sitters included a number of American socialites and the novelist Edith Wharton. Paillet's reputation led to the artist receiving commissions from the Parisian jeweller Boucheron as well as Tiffany, New York. The image on page 20 (bottom) shows a pendant watch made by Verger Frères for Tiffany with panels signed by Paillet. Of oval form, this watch has a border of pearls and, like the pocket watch discussed above, is set with ivory panels to the front and back, both of which are painted, once again, in similarly muted tones and depict neoclassical figures and putti.

Brighter and more vibrant enamel decoration was executed by using the technique of cloisonné. The image on page 20 (top) illustrates a polychrome cloisonné-enamel-decorated watch case supplied by the Swiss maker Longines to their Berlin agent in 1903. This is typical

BELOW Seeland, with enamel-painted portrait miniature by John Graff, c. 1890. An 18 ct yellow gold, enamel, ruby- and diamond-set hunting-cased lever watch, the enamel portrait depicting Maharaja Pratap Singh of Orchha
Diameter 51 mm

OPPOSITE Unsigned Swiss movement, c. 1900. An 18 ct yellow gold open-faced lever watch with miniature enamel-painted ivory panels attributed to Fernand Paillet
Diameter 46 mm



