

# TIME TO TELL

The *On Time* Spring Poll asked 50 of the world's top watch experts to select their favourite time-only watch—no complications necessary

## 1. ARIEL ADAMS

Founder & editor, A Blog to Watch



It isn't until you flip over the simple yet stately **Ferdinand Berthoud Chronomètre FB 2RE** that you begin to realise

this is no ordinary timepiece. The dial-side of these watches merely displays the time, albeit with a ticking versus sweeping seconds hand (unlike most other mechanical watches). The complex and beautifully decorated movement tells another story. The highly precise mechanism uses a series of exotic tricks to achieve impressive timing performance. Those include a hard-to-assemble chain-driven power transmission system, and a system called a remontoire that ensures timing consistency and produces the ticking action. It is one of the most complicated and lavish timepieces you can buy that still offers a simple wearing and reading experience.

## 2. CARLOS ALONSO

Director, *Tiempo de Relojes*



I have always been intrigued by the **Omega 1947 Cal 30 I** back tourbillon prototype auctioned at

Phillips in 2017. It is a *rara avis* and it has contemporary-looking beauty:



"One of the most lavish timepieces that still offers a simple experience"  
ARIEL ADAMS

steel, two-tone dial with a charismatic tourbillon back. The watch has a refined but simple industrial aesthetic that is unique to Omega.

## 3. JASEM AL ZERAEI

Watch collector



The **Patek Philippe Ref. 2508**, because it's the first waterproof case design for a non-complicated watch

and the balance of the dial is just perfect. The dagger hands sit elegantly on the dial and perfectly complement the symmetrical square indexes. The downturned lugs make the case seem almost "lugless" when looking at the watch from certain angles, as if it's floating—on the wrist it's even more mesmerising. Yes, the watch is a modest 34.5mm case size, however, even with my big wrists it wears perfectly due to its thickness and the way the lugs sit on the wrist. This steel version of the 2508 is one of the rare variants made by Patek Philippe. There is so much nostalgia surrounding this era, and it almost feels like it was a simpler operation with watchmakers taking a little bit more time than today. I am in love with this watch, and I'm still on the hunt for the perfect version. I own a yellow-gold version, which sits in a safe and is allocated to my son.

## 4. GEORGE BAMFORD

Founder, Bamford Watch Department and Bamford London



I love the **Zenith Pilot Type 20 Adventure** in a 45mm bronze case with a gradient green dial. I cherish the look

and how robust it is. From the wonderful numbers on the dial to the oversized onion crown and the strap, the whole vibe is a sense of adventure, which perfectly suits its large size.



"The whole vibe is a sense of adventure, which perfectly suits its large size"  
GEORGE BAMFORD

## 5. VIVIENNE BECKER

Journalist & author;  
*V.F. On Time* contributor



I know it's quaint and old school, but I actually wear a watch to tell the time. Only the time, unencumbered.

For this reason, I love the **Cartier Tank Must** watch, which has the graphic Tank classicism (first sold in 1921), combined with the 1970s vibe of Must de Cartier. My choice from the new Tank Must collection is the large model in steel on a powder-blue non-animal, plant-based strap. Despite being a paid-up and committed technophobe, I'm fascinated by the SolarBeat photovoltaic technology that allows light in through perforated Roman numerals to power the battery. The watch represents perfect dialogue between past, present and future—and I can tell the time.

## 6. ALEXANDRE BIGLER

Vice president & head of watches,  
Christie's Asia Pacific



With stunning good looks, the black enamel dial **Patek Philippe Ref. 2526** in pink gold is the epitome of rarity and beauty. Only eight examples of the watch in pink gold with a black enamel dial have appeared at auction to date.

Among the numerous different variations of the Ref. 2526, this one is highly regarded because of its incredible rarity and iconic appeal. Enamel dials on any wristwatch are very special, as they are fundamentally time-consuming and costly to make, and can never be truly mass-produced. The fact that enamel can last indefinitely adds to its desirability.

## 7. PAUL BOUTROS

Head of Americas and strategic adviser,  
Phillips in association with Bacs & Russo



An all-time favourite time-only watch is the **Rexhep Rexhepi Chronomètre Contemporain**.

Powered by an exquisitely hand finished, highly symmetric, in-house chronometer movement, this watch is simply superb. It is housed inside a wonderfully proportioned and distinctive case with dramatic, curved lugs inspired by some of the most important vintage wristwatches. It also features a sublime, grand feu enamel dial and handmade hands. It approaches perfection in nearly every way, and represents the very best of mechanical watchmaking.

## 8. GISBERT BRUNNER

Co-founder of Uhrenkosmos.com



I would choose the **Tudor Black Bay Ceramic** because for moderate money, precision freaks can get

a 41mm ceramic case that is waterproof up to 10 bar. The bezel, the screw-down crown and the display back are made of PVD-coated steel. Before being installed, the automatic



"Precision freaks can get a 41mm ceramic case that is waterproof up to 10 bar"  
GISBERT BRUNNER

calibre MT5602 with around 70 hours of power reserve has to undergo the official Swiss chronometer test. In addition, the finished timepiece must pass a comprehensive METAS-certified Master Chronometer check. Magnetic fields of up to 15,000 gauss must not bring the movement, which displays the hours, minutes and seconds, to a standstill.

## 9. CARSON CHAN

Collector & chief adviser,  
Fondation de la Haute Horlogerie



The **Longines Heritage Sector Dial** (Ref. L2.828.4.53.2) captures both elegance and timeless designs in

a value-packed combo. Inspired by a design from 1934, this is a faithful re-edition both in its overall design and style, right down to the typeface used. The watch has a stainless-steel 38.5mm case (which I believe is the next hip size—under 40mm) and an automatic movement that features a silicon balance, making this timepiece attractive both aesthetically and mechanically.

## 10. VANESSA CHICHA

Founder of Iconeek



Simplicity is not sobriety, but rather perfection, precision and elegance. The **Patek Philippe**

**Calatrava Ref. 530A** made in 1941 is, for me, the quintessence of the time-only watch. Composed of steel with an intense black dial and Breguet numerals, its simplicity is excellent. The watch has a perfect mechanism, an exceptional design and a sensuality. A precious object with personality, it embodies the qualities of prestigious watchmaking.

## 11. AUSTEN CHU

Founder & CEO, Wristcheck



My pick would have to be the playful **Rolex Oyster Perpetual** 41mm in Tiffany Blue—or any colour, for that matter. I was incredibly happy when Rolex refreshed the Oyster



"The dials breathed fresh air into the Oyster Perpetual line, resonating with younger collectors"  
AUSTEN CHU

Perpetual line in 2020 with an array of bright colours. In my opinion, it was one of the boldest product releases Rolex has done in the past decade, and I'm all for it. The dials breathed fresh air into the Oyster Perpetual line, resonating deeply with both younger collectors and seasoned enthusiasts alike. A modern, less complicated, and affordable Stella dial available in a multitude of sizes and hues—what's not to love?

## 12. ROB CORDER

Co-founder, *WatchPro*



There is nowhere to hide imperfections in a simple three-hander, which is why I would choose the £50,000

platinum **Grand Seiko Spring Drive Ref. SBGD201** from the Masterpiece collection. Its pure white dial has a stunning glittering diamond-dust effect reminiscent of a crisp winter morning.

## 13. JONATHAN DARRACOTT

Global head of watches,  
Bonhams



The **Frodsham Double Impulse Chronometer** was worked on for many years by Charles Frodsham & Co

using the Daniels double impulse chronometer escapement as its base. It is steeped in watchmaking heritage, taking inspiration from the Frodsham archives. The watch's aesthetics are echoed through the dial and displayed in the presentation of the totally symmetrical layout for the movement—a far from simple time-only watch.



**14. SIMON DE BURTON**

Journalist & author;  
V.F. *On Time* contributor



The **Series 1** by Isle of Man watchmaker **Roger Smith** is the very definition of a horological work of art.

Although clean, bold and instantly readable, this watch is also a showcase of artisan craftsmanship that can be made to order with a choice of options that mark it out as being truly handmade in the best English tradition. I believe this is the ultimate time-only heirloom.

**15. JAMES DOWLING**

Journalist & author;  
V.F. *On Time* contributor



I have always loved military watches because of their pared-back, austere design. My personal

favourite is the **Jaeger-LeCoultre Mk11** because behind its almost Bauhausian case and dial is the stunning 488SBr movement. It has a chronometer-class movement that's so good Vacheron used it as the basis for the top-of-the-line Chronomètre Royal. Horologically speaking, the JLC Mk11 is an iron fist in a velvet glove—it may look decorative, but don't mess with it.

**16. BRIAN DUFFY**

CEO, The Watches of Switzerland Group



This is a tough assignment for me, actually. Thanks to my privileged position I own a good collection



“Clean, bold and instantly readable, this is the ultimate time-only heirloom”  
**SIMON DE BURTON**

of timepieces, but not one that is time-only. Either I have dates or calendars or chronographs. At a minimum I want a date. So what I would choose would be a black dial, 43mm **IWC Big Pilot**. It's what an aviator's watch should be: big, legible but still elegant and cool.

**17. DAVID DUGGAN**

Owner, David Duggan Watches



My favourite time-only watch has to be the **Patek Philippe Ref. 3960J**, commonly known as the Officer's

Watch. I love the simplicity of the Breguet hands, Breguet numerals and classic white dial. This combines with the turban-style winder and hinged caseback to create a delightful, understated wearing experience.

**18. JACK FORSTER**

Editor-in-chief, Hodinkee.com;  
V.F. *On Time* contributor



This is a very tough decision, because time-only watches are my favourite genre and I have a lot of

favourites. Probably the one I have owned and loved the most, and miss the most, is the **Omega 30T2RG Chronomètre**. The one I had was an early model with a split bimetallic balance and blued steel balance. It was one of the purest expressions of honest, unadorned but uncompromising precision watchmaking I have ever seen, and the only watch I've ever regretted selling.

**19. ALEXANDER FRIEDMAN**

Collector & founder of  
AF Consulting



I truly believe that every decade there is a special watch that comes to light. The **Bulgari Octo Finissimo** in titanium is definitely

one of these. A stealth design, technically amazing, unbelievably light and slim, very comfortable to wear and elegant in all occasions—this is a collector's must-have.



“A stealth design, technically amazing, unbelievably light and slim”  
**ALEXANDER FRIEDMAN**

**20. MARCO GABELLA**

Chairman and publisher, *Watchonista*



Born in 2005 from Nicolas G Hayek's desire to embody Abraham-Louis Breguet's distinctive

style in a wristwatch, the **Breguet 7027 Tradition**, was a game-changer. By displaying part of the movement on the dial side, including the inimitable Breguet bridges, the 7027 opened a new dimension for time-only watches.

**21. PATRICK GETREIDE**

Watch collector



I'm in love with my **Patek Philippe Calatrava Ref. 530A**, black dial with Breguet numerals, circa 1941, which is one

of a kind and in pristine condition. Fashions come and go, but this timeless, understated watch represents the quintessence of purity, simplicity and quiet distinction in its design.

**22. ALEXANDRE GHOTBI**

Head of watches continental Europe and the Middle East, Phillips in association with Bacs & Russo



The **Kari Voutilainen Observatoire** is the perfect blend of vintage and contemporary. By using the storied

Peseux 260 Observatory movement and hand-finishing it to a degree never seen before (except on watches by Philippe Dufour), Voutilainen created an instant classic that could be personalised by the owner with choice of guilloché and movement finish. It is believed that he made fewer than 80.

**23. ERIC GIROUD**

Owner & designer,  
Through the Looking Glass



My choice would be **F.P. Journe's Chronomètre Bleu Calibre 1304**. This watch offers a nice

balance between modernity and tradition both in its design and in the materials used. The depth of the blue of its dial is amazing. The balance between the colour of the tantalum case and the blue of the dial is charming. It is a simple yet sophisticated watch.

**24. JOHN GOLDBERGER**

Watch collector & author



Ten years ago, at a Sotheby's auction in New York, a unique **Patek Philippe** time-only wristwatch

appeared, which had been made especially for **Henry Graves Jr**, one of the greatest watch collectors of the last century. During my life as a collector, I had never seen a watch so intriguing and so interesting. The massive curved rectangular platinum case (47.5mm x 39mm) was manufactured in only one example, with a silvered matt platinum dial and white gold applied Roman hours mixed with lapidated baton and pyramidal indexes. The 12-ligne movement stamped twice with seal of Geneva represented, at that time, the highest quality of Patek Philippe's wristwatch calibres. In 1947, in the US this unique wristwatch had the same price of a Patek Philippe Perpetual Calendar Chronograph Ref. 1518.



“It's rugged enough to go anywhere, and minimalist enough to slip past the style police”  
**KEN KESSLER**

**25. KRISTIAN HAAGEN**

Watch influencer & writer



My favourite is the **Vacheron Constantin Historiques American 1921** in rose gold. The angled design makes it

a great timepiece when driving. This was validated when I went for a drive on my 1987 Yamaha Ténéré motorcycle with this illustrious watch on my wrist a few hours after purchasing it.

**26. ANDREW HILDRETH**

Watch editor, *I-M Intelligent Magazine*



I will go with the **Greubel Forsey Signature 1**. There is more to this watch than meets the eye. At first

glance it only has three hands to record the hours, minutes and seconds. However, the construction is modular; there are no plates or overall dial. The movement construction harks back to early English and French pocket watches, and the finishing on the various elements is second to none. The movement construction is an object lesson in the time-only mechanical movement, as you can follow the gear train from main spring to the balance to the hands. It is also rare, being limited to only 66 pieces.

**27. HOROLOGY ANCIENNE**

Father & son watch collectors



Senior: The **Patek Philippe 570P** is remarkably elegant and it highlights the precise understanding Patek

has of simplicity. Junior: From the movement to the dial, the **Patek Philippe 2526** in any metal demonstrates pure excellence.

**28. KEN KESSLER**

Freelance writer



The **IWC Mk 11 Cal. 89** may be the finest manual-wind movement ever developed. It's rugged

enough to go anywhere, and minimalist enough to slip past the style police. Yup, turn it up to 11.



“The angled design makes it a great timepiece when driving”  
**KRISTIAN HAAGEN**

**29. JUSTIN KOULLAPIS**

Partner, The Watch Club and fellow of the British Horological Institute; V.F. *On Time* contributor



Twenty years in the making, **Charles Frodsham & Co's** handmade wristwatch **Double Impulse**

**Chronometer**, the first to employ the Daniels double impulse chronometer escapement, is a masterclass in restraint balanced with exquisite finishing. The dial is more alluring than any other made today; its micro-frosted ceramic draws your gaze, yet offers nowhere for it to focus. It has a shadowless depth that has been compared to banks of fresh snow.

**30. NAZANIN LANKARANI**

Journalist & author;  
V.F. *On Time* contributor



My vote goes to the new **Rolex Oyster Perpetual** in the 36mm case, and in any colour I can get my hands

on—but if I had to choose, then Candy Pink. It's a beautiful watch.

**31. SEAN LI**

Editorial director,  
*Blackbird Watch Manual*



The timepiece that immediately came to mind is the **F.P. Journe Chronomètre Souverain**. It

represents the very essence of fine watchmaking from one of the eminent modern masters of the craft, with an instantly recognisable aesthetic for astute collectors.





“The watch can be worn with casual jeans and red-carpet gowns”  
MING LIU

### 32. MING LIU

Journalist; V.F. On Time contributor



The **Cartier Tank Must** is a masterclass in minimalist watch design. It has a completely stark dial, save for two hands chicly set on block colour—I prefer the house red but the blue and green are equally statement-making. The watch can be worn with casual jeans *and* red-carpet gowns, and it proves that design simplicity can also be highly sophisticated.

### 33. TRACEY LLEWELLYN

Editor, *Telegraph Time*; editor, *Horological Journal*; V.F. On Time contributor



As someone with poor eyesight, I never thought a black-on-black watch would appeal, but since its launch in 2019, the black ceramic **Bulgari Octo Finissimo** has been my dream watch. Deceptive in its simplicity, the sand-blasted ceramic case, crown, dial, bracelet and hidden buckle result in a 40mm watch that is just 5.5mm thick, making it incredibly comfortable to wear. But the real magic lies in its legibility thanks to the black chrome hands and indexes that refract the light and make the dial astonishingly easy to read.

### 34. MARCUS MARGULIES

Watch fanatic



I have always liked design, originality and rarity, and can think of nothing better than a unique **Falcone** watch. Dino Falcone was a gifted Italian

watchmaker and artist who made 18 individual pieces based on the melting watches depicted in the painting *The Persistence of Memory* by Salvador Dalí.

### 35. TAKESHI MATSUYAMA

Watchmaking historian



For me, the best time-only watch is the **Cartier Tank Normale**; a masterpiece of square-watch design. It is simple but perfect—I love the Art Deco styling.

### 36. JEAN PAUL MENICUCCI

Leather craftsman & strap maker



I bought my first **Patek Philippe Nautilus** in 2007, and ever since I have loved this model in all its variations: yellow gold, rose gold, steel and bracelet. The 5711 version is my ideal watch though from which I hardly ever part. With its soft, smooth lines, I consider it one of the most beautiful watches in the world.

### 37. ANDERS MODIG

Journalist & photographer; V.F. On Time contributor



The **H. Moser & Cie Venturer** with a Vantablack dial is an extremely elegant timepiece, with a white-gold case and beautiful, slender blackened hands. The extremely strong impression of Vantablack reminds you of the power of a black hole.

### 38. BARBARA PALUMBO

Watch and jewellery editor; V.F. On Time contributor



As a young adult in the early 1990s, I started becoming more aware of timepieces worn by friends. I remember a boyfriend had a **Breitling Navitimer** that impressed me, stylistically, but it was far too obnoxious for my small wrist. I'm grateful Breitling has since launched a 35mm no-date version of the model, which I now wear confidently, and regularly.

### 39. LAURENT PICCIOTTO

Owner & founder, Chronopassion



Without any doubt the **MB&F Legacy Machine 101 Blue Sky** reaches an unequalled presence and technical performance. Maximilian Büsser, the designer of this watch, is the master of contemporary watchmaking. Being surprised is my favourite feeling and Büsser is an expert at doing this.

### 40. BILL PRINCE

Journalist; V.F. On Time contributor



There is something extremely satisfying about the ordinary done extraordinarily well, and the supposedly humble 36mm **Rolex Oyster Perpetual** is a case in point. The watch has the same superlative chronometry and bone-crunching construction found in more elevated examples within the Oyster series, but in a case size that neatly swerves the Rubicon separating modern from vintage. Robust, reliable and—if you forgo 2020's hot dial colours—genuinely discreet. The perfect time-only ticker.

### 41. AHMED RAHMAN

Watch collector



My all-time favourite time-only watch would have to be the **Patek Philippe Golden Ellipse Ref. 5738P-001**, with its platinum case and stunning blue-gold dial and ultra-thin automatic Calibre 240 beating inside. The allure of the Golden Ellipse lies in



“I wear my Breitling Navitimer confidently, and regularly”  
BARBARA PALUMBO



“It's as comfortable to wear as a dress watch, with a suit, or casually”  
JOHN REARDON

its sleek and elegant, perfectly proportioned aesthetics, which takes its cue from the golden ratio discovered by ancient Greek mathematicians. The design makes it not only the perfect black-tie watch, but it looks equally at home when paired with casual attire. This versatile timepiece has a worthy place in the horological halls of fame.

### 42. JOHN REARDON

Founder, Collectability LLC



As the most modern interpretation of the jumbo-sized **Patek Philippe Golden Ellipse**, the platinum **Ref. 5738P-001** is my favourite time-only wristwatch. Let everyone else chase the pieces designed by Gérald Genta and leave the pure Patek Philippe-designed Ellipse for me and other like-minded collectors who don't chase trends. In the line since 2008 with the classic blue-gold dial, this watch is fitted with the automatic Calibre 240. It's an elegant, minimalist watch that is as comfortable to wear as a dress watch, with a suit, or casually.

### 43. DARYN SCHNIPPER

Chairman of Sotheby's international watch division



My pick is the **Rolex Milgauss Ref. 6541**. Launched in 1956 and originally made for scientists working in high-magnetic fields, the watch resists magnetic fields up to 1,000 gauss—the measurement for magnetic induction. It is the ultimate Rolex tool watch, although you don't need to be a scientist to wear it.

### 44. ABDUL HAMIED SEDDIQI

Chairman, Seddiqi Holding



The **Rolex Oyster Perpetual** immediately comes to mind, given its impact on the brand and the industry as a whole. As the first waterproof watch, it redefined functional usability. Even the way the watch was promoted and its association with those seeking to break records by crossing the English Channel have become marketing benchmarks for the industry today.

### 45. CLAUDE SFEIR

Watch collector



Elegance is best achieved through simplicity. Each time I look at my **Philippe Dufour Simplicity**, this is what I feel. I cherish one of them in particular as it's made with my favourite colour combination and was a surprise gift.

### 46. DANIEL SOMLO

Director, Somlo London



Complexity and simplicity are two opposing concepts that rarely marry in one watch, but the 1960s **Omega Constellation Ref. 167.005** with dogleg lugs pulls it off. It does this by combining the technical prestige of a multi-award winning, precision timekeeper with the unique look of a dress watch designed by the great Gérald Genta. Rose-gold case, silver pie-pan dial, onyx hours, please.

### 47. JIAXIAN SU

Collector & founder, SJXWatches.com



My favourite is a **Cartier Crash** that I ordered three years ago, which was a well-timed decision as it is a much-hyped watch in today's market. I customised the dial by desaturating the colours to create a shading and tone that complemented the watch's extreme shape. The one bit of colour is the cabochon in the crown. I am really pleased with it.

### 48. TOBY SUTTON

Co-founder and director, Watches of Knightsbridge



British military watches from the 1940-50s are firm favourites. I would pick out the **Omega 1953 RAF pilot's watch**, or a “dirty dozen” **IWC Mark 11**. They were made as time-only tool watches to military specification and often used chronometer-grade movements. They are also hard to beat aesthetically.

### 49. ROBIN SWITHINBANK

Journalist and writer; V.F. On Time contributor



The industry has its topnotes and one-offs, but the baseline is always the time-only workhorse. And if there were only one, for me it would be the **Rolex Oyster Perpetual 41** with a black dial. It has a peerless form, with assured dynamics and a dial name impervious to the passing of time.

### 50. KIM-EVA WEMPE

Owner & managing partner, Wempe



The opening of the Wempe showroom on New York's Fifth Avenue in October 1980 was an important milestone for our family company. To commemorate the occasion, we developed our own watch in co-operation with Chopard. The **Chopard Wempe 5th Avenue** featured integrated strap lugs and came in a tricolour stainless steel and gold version. This model has stood the test of time and has become my all-time favourite. ■



“The Chopard Wempe 5th Avenue has stood the test of time”  
KIM-EVA WEMPE