

## THE COLLECTOR

## Hunting for the unusual

A Canadian watch fan says independents like Urwerk and Jaquet Droz have spiced up his collection



PHOTOGRAPHS BY IAN WILLMS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

## At home

Clockwise from above, Dan Tanenbaum in his basement workshop; a Graham wristwatch from his collection; and one of the miniature motorcycles that he has made from watch parts.

BY KATHLEEN BECKETT

"I look for something unusual," Dan Tanenbaum, a 45-year-old watch collector in Toronto said about his fondness for timepieces made by independent watchmakers. That kind of quest actually is a big part of his life, from his internet start-ups to his hobby of making mini-motorcycles out of watch parts.

Mr. Tanenbaum has been a collector since childhood, but he did not begin with watches.

"I come from a long line of collectors," he said in a telephone interview. "My grandfather collected African art; my parents collected photography. I grew up going to antique shops with my parents and got the collecting bug."

About 20 years ago, his mother, Carole Tanenbaum, started collecting vintage costume jewelry and soon became an authority. "She literally wrote the book on vintage jewelry, 'Fabulous Fakes,'" Mr. Tanenbaum said with evident pride. "She would wear what she collected," he recalled and he realized that if he collected watches, he could do the same — and enjoy his finds, "not just put them in a box."

But before he started buying watches, he said, "I spent two months researching them. You can't just say 'I'm going to buy a watch.' What kind? A chronograph? Waterproof? By what maker?"

He made his first purchase at an antique show in Toronto: an Omega Speedmaster. "I loved the history behind it, that this was the watch that was worn on the moon. I liked the style, the simplicity, the pedigree. I had never really worn a watch before. It hooked me immediately and I thought, 'I need more watches!'"

He soon became enamored of vintage



Rolex sports watches, and today his Rolex Submariner Reference 6538 remains a favorite. But "my collection doesn't have an ego. If a watch charms me, it's in my collection" whether it's a Casio or an IWC.

What watches would he love to own? "There are a lot of watches I'd buy if I had a bucket of dough," he said. "Any Patek Philippe Perpetual Calendar I would go crazy over."

But then his practical side kicked in: "I can't wear a condo around my wrist," he said, a reference to the brand's high price. "I can wear a car, but not a condo."

After some years of watch collection, Mr. Tanenbaum had a revelation. "I realized at a certain point that my collection started looking the same. So I figured

out what were the holes."

A gaping one, he said, was "novelty." When a fellow watch collector told him he wanted to sell his Urwerk, Mr. Tanenbaum was intrigued. When he saw it, he was blown away. With its multiple time indicators, he said, "it's a totally different way of telling time" that almost requires an instruction manual to figure out.

Mr. Tanenbaum's longtime watch dealer, Derek Dier of London, Ontario, (he supplied vintage watches for "Mad Men"), found some more pieces by independent makers. "When Derek finds a unique watch, he will call me, and we'll have lunch. I always need a story" — behind the watch — "and the better the story, the more intrigued I am."

## JEWELRY BOX



## FROM VAN CLEEF &amp; ARPELS, A FAIRY TABLEAU

For the past decade Van Cleef & Arpels has been honing its Poetic Complications range, a narrative-based watchmaking collection designed for women.

As Nicolas Bos, the Parisian company's president and chief executive, explained: "As a jewelry house, we have been telling stories that we feel resonate with feminine tastes. We have colleagues that create fantastic men's watches — highly technical, very masculine sports pieces — but that is not our world. What we try to do is transfer our identity into the world of watchmaking."

And making its debut at the Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie this week is the Fée Ondine automaton, a bejeweled timepiece that is 12 inches high and 15 inches wide. It was about eight years in the making, involving the skills of both in-house artisans and stonecutters, enamel specialists and cabinet makers from about 15 independent workshops.

Their work presents the story of the Fée Ondine, a fairy: A leaf's movement wakes a sleeping fairy, who watches a water lily bloom and a butterfly dance before she returns to sleep. The sequence is only 45 seconds long but it displays the multiple complex movements of the four elements: The leaf's trembling, the fairy's twitching wings and arching neck, the lily's opening, the butterfly's rising and, finally, the fairy's falling back asleep — all heralded by clear, nursery-rhyme-like chimes. "Altogether it's one single mechanism where everything is intricately linked," Mr. Bos said.

The design process pushed the house's creativity, he recalled. "It was different to a piece of jewelry or even a watch. We looked at it like a movie script or story board," he said. "The thinking was, if we can go from still life to animation, as you would from photograph to a short movie, then there is definitely something to develop that does not really exist in this industry."

The mechanisms were produced in collaboration with François Junod, an automaton specialist in Sainte-Croix, Switzerland, the birthplace of the music box industry. ("It's a very tiny village in the middle of the mountains," Mr. Bos said. "It's true Switzerland.")

The automaton showcases the house's savoir faire. The fairy's translucent blue wings are the result of plique-à-jour enameling. Her face, much larger than those of the ballerinas in the house's signature brooches, was a particular challenge. The fairy is the size of a doll, but "you don't want it to look like a doll," Mr. Bos said. "The question was how to keep the preciousness." In the end, an expert lapidarist faceted an aquamarine by eye to suggest a feminine expression.

The whole scene rests on an ebony veneer base with a retrograde-hour movement that has an eight-day power reserve. The hour is indicated by a ruby ladybug crafted in the house's signature Mystery Setting.

There is one more mystery: Will the Fée Ondine be offered for sale? "It's been such a long journey," Mr. Bos said. "My first wish is to see if it triggers interest and emotion. Then we'll decide." MING LIU

## GEAR

## Gifts for your watch

A new year is traditionally the time for reinventing oneself. And if you have a tired timepiece, perhaps some custom accessories would give it new life, too. KATIE KELLY

## 1. NATO TODAY

The versatile NATO strap, named for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization though most likely created for the British armed forces, has been in demand the past few years. Using a nylon strap completely changes the way a watch looks and feels, said Carl Evans of GasGasBones, a British company that specializes in the style.

During a 25-year career with the Royal Air Force, Mr. Evans worked on a range of survival equipment, such as ejection seat components, parachutes and harnesses, which piqued his interest in textiles and sewing. After buying an Omega Speedmaster in 2004, he reproduced a NATO strap from Velcro and found there was a demand for similar looks.

From tailoring to design, the process is personalized, with prices ranging from 15 to 55 pounds, or \$18 to \$68. [gasgasbones.com](http://gasgasbones.com)

## 2. A STYLISH HOME

Louis Vuitton was founded in 1854 as a maker of custom luggage, a specialty it continues today. Its made-to-order watch trunk — originally created to pay tribute to Geneva, the world capital of luxury watchmakers — illustrates the house's custom flair.

The trunk, which can house 114 watches, is covered in Vuitton's iconic Damier patterned canvas and has a blue indigo microfiber lining. Each one takes more than 300 hours to complete at the workshop in Asnières-sur-Seine, France.

The version pictured, in graphite, is about four and a half feet tall and priced at around \$140,000. [louisvuitton.com](http://louisvuitton.com)

## 3. OLD, BUT NEW

Peter Gunny prides himself on making new leather look old, a concept he describes as "artificial vintage." All



ERWAN GREY



Gunny Straps are handmade, using small tools, in Mr. Gunny's workshop in Surabaya, Indonesia. But while the look is old, his leather is always fresh from the factory, he noted.

Most straps are priced from \$117 to \$300. [gunnystraps.blogspot.com](http://gunnystraps.blogspot.com)

## 4. BEING SAFE

Personal safes and vaults were created for that extra measure of security for watch and jewelry collections, as well as other valuables.

For example, Brown Safe of California offers its Man Safe, which can include automatic winding units from

Orbita Watchwinders.

Prices range from \$3,680 to \$24,775, depending on size and interior configuration. [brownsafe.com](http://brownsafe.com)

## TIMING TIME

When asked about a timepiece accessory for 2017, Su Jia Xian, a noted collector and blogger from Singapore, suggested a watch timing machine. The unit, also called a timegrapher, gives a quick snapshot of how well a watch is running. The machines are not always reliable, he warned, but they are fun. Nonbranded ones can be bought online for less than \$200.