

David Linley (left) and Roger Smith (right) ▲

Isle of Man watchmaker R.W. Smith collaborates with British furniture maker Linley—with luxurious results

BY THEODORE DIEHL-PESHKUR

Englishness has always been a rather special characteristic, whichever way you might attempt to describe it. Yet despite the impossibility of defining such a broad and vague term accurately, Englishness is a quality so singular and specific that everyone unconsciously and automatically conjures up a particular image or eccentric individual.

When it comes to products, it gets a little bit easier to define, as one particularly striking and deeply inherent quality of English products might well be quantified as a kind of conservatism in methods of construction and the corresponding use of materials that leads to high-quality products. Rolls Royce is an exemplary specimen of that ideal.

However, that might be a case of vast oversimplification; one merely has to think of pop and punk music, Vivienne Westwood

or Damien Hirst, and you know that this conservative aspect can often manifest itself within a concurrent stubbornness, a new angle of view or approach, and a kind of faith in doing things exactly the way you want to—regardless of the reactions of society at large or its institutions. What the English vividly describe as “bloody mindedness.” Perhaps it has something to do with living on an island and having to fend for yourself against the world past the coastline.

A shared vision

This particular English vision couldn't be better exemplified than by two companies that have entered a new stage of collaboration: Linley & Co., founded by David Linley in 1985, and R. W. Smith Watches, founded in 2001 by watchmaker Roger Smith. Both uphold a strong affinity for handcrafted and typically British

quality and design, and they pride themselves on their dedication to the pursuit of luxurious excellence in the creation of fine furniture and interiors (Linley) and fine English watchmaking (R. W. Smith Watches).


Both of the men behind these products also share a similar hands-on experience in their respective disciplines: David Linley, a nephew of the Queen of England and raised in aristocratic circles, decided to follow his passion and first trained as a cabinet-maker in the traditional British vein. Roger Smith began studying watchmaking as a child and entered the Manchester School of Watchmaking at the age of sixteen, continuing afterwards as the only apprentice of the famed Dr. George Daniels, MBE. Under Daniels's tutelage he was able to learn the principles captured within the horological masterpieces from the golden age



R.W. SMITH

WE'RE

ENGLISH



All R. W. Smith watches are delivered in a specially designed and handmade box created by Linley, with partitions and space for straps, the watch's certificate/servicing booklet and travel pouch.

of English watchmaking and all the methods and means of creating such timepieces by hand.

The special qualities mentioned above are clearly seen in both firms' attitudes. David Linley has chosen to retain completely traditional methods of construction and workmanship in his furniture, eschewing everything from the world of mass production. Yet his furniture combines this workmanship with a modern freshness and clean-lined approach in design that comes across as stylishly contemporary yet peppered with hidden references to the past.

Roger Smith has similarly chosen to turn his back on the mass production of watches completely, and instead focuses on creating

OWNERSHIP
&
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The construction of the Horologist's Bureau, like all Linley furniture, requires the trained eyes and hands of highly experienced craftsmen as well as the choicest materials for its realization. Each Horologist's Bureau will be delivered with a specially created R. W. Smith wristwatch.

to the passing tastes of the moment is firmly embedded in both companies' foundations.

In contact

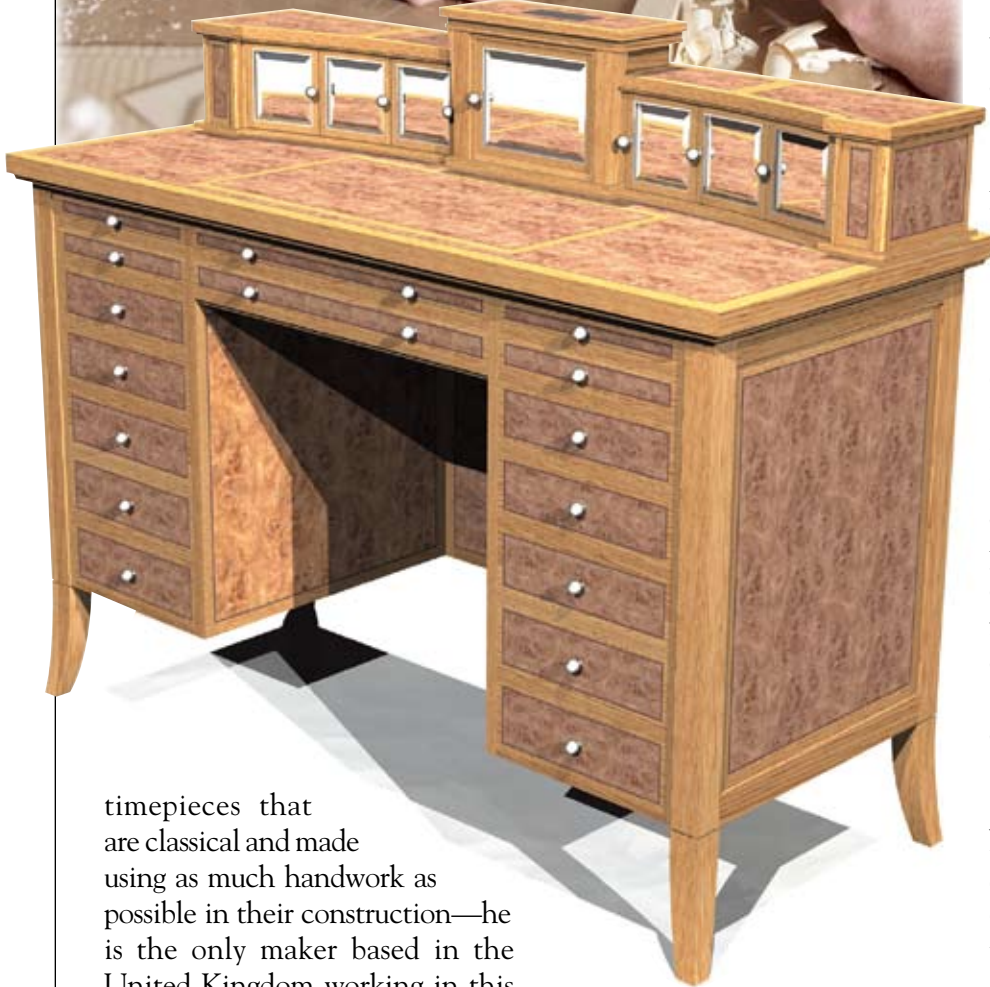
With so many shared values and concepts it comes as no surprise, then, that both of these very firms have been in contact for a longer period of time, quietly working behind the scenes utilizing each other's special qualities.

David has long been a great admirer of the R. W. Smith workshop and the exquisitely crafted timepieces they create, and Roger Smith approached Linley from the founding of his workshop to create a series of bespoke watch presentation boxes for the owners of R. W. Smith timepieces. This first step heralded the beginning of collaboration between the two British brands some years ago that continues today.

Watch and bureau

Now the relationship has gone a step further with the creation of an exquisite, bespoke horologist's bureau, designed by Linley and based on Roger Smith's horological concepts—with something additional that no other watch bureau or cabinet has ever offered before.

This is to be the first watch bureau of its kind to be created today together with a unique timepiece, created solely for Linley by R. W. Smith Watches. These bespoke bureaus will each contain one Series 2 wristwatch specially



timepieces that are classical and made using as much handwork as possible in their construction—he is the only maker based in the United Kingdom working in this fashion. Thick silver dials, with deep guilloché composed of several sections; hour, minute and seconds hands sculpted by hand from solid pieces of gold; and in-house manufactured escapements are just a few of Roger Smith's trademarks.

It is clear the companies created by these men also share many essential philosophical similari-

ties, permeated as they are with an idiosyncratic modern sense of what defines true British luxury today and thoroughly infused with personal insights into the unique past of timeless English creations. This typically English sensibility lends both brands authority and distinction in their specific realms. Longevity rather than adherence



Each hour, minute, seconds and power-reserve hand of a typical R. W. Smith wristwatch is shaped by hand from a single piece of 18-karat gold. A complete set of hands, including several levels of polishing after shaping and sculpting, takes more than ten days to complete.

the concept of a traditional watchmaker's bench, with its various drawers and areas for storing movements and tools. For the collector, the needs for strap changing, light polishing and cleaning of the case, storage of small parts and winding boxes for automatic timepieces and holders for manual winding pieces have all been considered. These aspects are combined within a handsome piece of cabinetry with a broad surface, thereby affording a safe and elegant area to enjoy the watches themselves or perform general upkeep.

The bureau

In the lower sections to the left and right, there are six watch winders concealed within each pedestal behind a door that simulates the façade of four drawer fronts. All hinges, knobs and beading are in nickel silver. In addition, there are three traditionally constructed drawers above for the storage of gentlemen's artifacts.

The central section of the worktop is unusual in that it is reversible and is lined on the underside in faux suede. This is so designed to prevent possible scratches or sliding of the watches during such operations as strap changing and also protects the inlaid wood surface from possible damage. Beneath this section, there is a lockable panel adorned with a marquetry depiction of a watch movement that can be removed to reveal an illuminated watch compartment.

created for it by the R. W. Smith workshops on the Isle of Man, and they will be the only watches created by the workshop carrying engraving with both the R. W. Smith and Linley names.

The bespoke horologist's bureau embodies many major and minor details of what a knowledgeable collector or horologist should require in terms of space and layout for a private collection of wristwatches. The inspiration for the design came from

Seven additional watches can be housed within the upper gallery, three to each side of a removable traveler's watch box. Each timepiece sits behind its own door, which can be either mirror-backed or glass with nickel silver beading, to enhance the view of the watches. The outer top panels of the gallery lift to reveal a shallow tray. As if this was not enough, there are additionally four secret compartments hidden within the bureau.

The watch

The limited-edition watches will be available in either red gold or platinum, with a choice of dials with handmade guilloché or engraving according to the client's taste. All the R. W. Smith trademark movement details will also be present of course: a free-sprung Quadradjust balance and co-axial escapement beating at 18,000 bph, gold chatons and cocks, 28 jewels and entirely hand-engraved lettering and numbers are just part of what can be expected. English finished, gilded and frosted plates, black polish finishing where applicable, a silver dial made up of several sections and with hand-engraved silver minute, hour, seconds and up & down chapters and hands of solid gold or blued steel (according to the model chosen) are part and parcel of what can be expected by the new owner of this limited-edition piece.

Together with the bureau in which it will be delivered, it's a collector's dream and a piece of "Englishness" at its very best. ☺