

Watching THE CLOCK

Jennifer Meredith talks to horologist and watchmaker, Roger W Smith, about British-made luxury timepieces

Two-hundred years ago, the British watchmaking industry was booming; one would simply have to turn to the likes of Thomas Earnshaw, John Roger Arnold or John Harrison in order to obtain a timepiece of unique beauty and everlasting craftsmanship. Today, however, British horologists are few and far between; options become even sparser when considering the amount of horologists able to craft a watch from scratch. Is it a dying art? Maybe. However, with the public's renewed interest in British-made goods, one would not be naïve to expect a revival in the near future.

Roger W Smith, protégée of the late highly skilled watchmaker, George Daniels, is one horologist calling for a rethinking of ethics within the industry of horology. A Roger W

Smith watch is entirely UK-made, a deliberate move by the firm to establish themselves as an honest and genuine British brand. In an open letter to watchmakers and collectors, Roger commented upon the current state of British watchmaking, warning of the damage that dishonesty could do to the industry: 'what concerns me is the lack of sincerity in British watchmaking; brands must be honest to the buyer, otherwise it'll destroy the integrity of horologists across the UK. It'll take a long time for us to recover from the damage already done, but it can be accomplished if brands are prepared to rethink their values'.

Living and working in the Isle of Man with his family and dogs, Roger spends much of his time in his studio, hand-making minuscule parts for stunning watches that will sell for >>



over £100,000. He states, 'my time is split between building one-off timepieces and developing new watches. My work changes almost seasonally as I work on varying projects and collections, but you can usually find me sitting at my bench – it's where I'm best placed!'

It was George Daniels who inspired him to enter the world of watchmaking. Roger was 17 when George, a visiting lecturer, delivered a riveting talk to his class at the Manchester School of Horology: 'it was really a pivotal moment for me. He was incredibly charismatic, and very inspiring'. Originally from Bolton, Roger moved to the Isle of Man in 1998 to work with George in his studio, absorbing as much watchmaking know-how as possible, including 'The Daniels Method' which involved mastering 32 trades that once traditionally supported the British watchmakers of the past.

On being an apprentice of the accomplished watchmaker, Roger states, 'working with George Daniels was an education; he was a very strong character, but a brilliant teacher, and I soaked up a lot of information from him'. A 30-year age gap separated the two creators; they maintained a professional relationship throughout their collaborative careers, but they were also friends. As Roger explains, 'he was very willing to advise and support me; he was a very supportive person'.

Roger dedicated his time to horology from a young age; he established his own studio and began hiring a dedicated team, and has been

crafting high quality timepieces throughout his working life, so it wasn't difficult for him to continue George Daniels' legacy when he passed in late 2011: 'when I incorporated George's studio, it was business as usual. I didn't feel any pressure, I was just happy to continue his work'.

It's a well-known fact that good things take time; producing a standard Roger W Smith watch can take around 11 months, from sourcing the raw materials to placing the finishing touches on the final product. 'What makes us different from other luxury watch brands is the low volume of products we make (only ten a year), and how we make them,' Roger explains. 'We only have seven people working in our studio, in comparison to large factories with hundreds of employees. Everything is handmade with great attention to detail, and so the process of creating a timepiece takes far longer; for example, one dial can take several weeks to manufacture'.

One design that Roger is particularly proud of is the Open Dial, a concept that uncovers

the sheer amount of work that building a watch movement. The Series 2 Open Dial wristwatch observe time ticking away via its three-dimensional architecture of dial work. He states, 'I design because all of the hard work a detail that goes into a watch deserves to be seen'.

Expect more exciting innovative firm; this year, they will be working on four timepieces, which is fantastic for such a small, independent firm. Roger explains, 'We'll be building models to display the visual architecture of the pieces, and we'll also be re-launching our website to tie in with the new

For more information, visit www.rwsmithwatches.com, or purchasing Roger W Smith timepiece 01624 897943. **R**