

## PATRIOTIC PRECISION

A detailed look at the prevailing styles of movement decoration found at the high end of Swiss, German, and English watchmaking.

*By Jack Forster*

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Watches are machines, but they're also part of a largely lost tradition in which there is no perceived conflict between creating something of beauty *and* something capable of high performance. Take the world-famous H4 marine chronometer, completed by John Harrison in the mid-18th century: Yes, it was the world's first successful sea-clock, but the movement itself is also so elaborately engraved that you wonder if the decoration might not have taken longer than the construction of the mechanism itself.

Over the centuries, major styles of movement decoration have arisen in countries with watchmaking industries, and in particular, Switzerland, Germany, and England all gradually evolved certain stylistic idioms. There was, and is, naturally, a certain degree of overlap, but nonetheless, idiosyncratic styles persist in each region. Especially at the high end, this has produced what is identifiable as a sort of visual terroir of watchmaking.

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## Roger W. Smith Series 2

Of these three movements, perhaps the purest expression of a national watch design and decoration style is from Roger Smith. This is not surprising, given his role as both the apprentice and heir apparent to Dr. George Daniels, and as an ambassador for English watchmaking in general. And though it's been adopted in a different form by Omega, Roger Smith's ongoing refinement of the co-axial escapement is as English as watchmaking gets – all the more so for being grounded in universal principles of horology.

One of the most basic characteristics of English watchmaking is the use of gilt movement finishing rather than rhodium plating; striping is also generally absent from the high-end, hand-made English watch. As a rule, the English approach (especially as it reached its high-water mark in the late 19th century) was soberer than the Swiss, and had this in common with the Germans. George Daniels wrote that “the English makers worked to a very high standard but did not make any obvious effort to intrigue the customer with a display of polished wheels and sparkling components.” Instead, flawless execution of fundamentals characterizes the English watch at its best, as demonstrated in Smith's current work, although this example also looks back to the 18th century English tradition of intricate engraving on certain components. The characteristically English combination of black-polished steel, blued screws, and the subtle glow of the gilt-finished plate is one of the most distinctive in all of watchmaking.



RMS 750 S

MMXVII



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R.W. SMITH

COACH SERIES



