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Isle of Man watchmaker's work attracts global interest

Mark Edwards

BBC Isle of Man



Smith's Isle of Man based enterprise is Britain's only hand made watch business

Isle of Man based watchmaker Roger W Smith has exhibited his work in a showcase of the world's most exceptional watches.

Smith makes 10 watches a year by hand and displayed his latest works at the prestigious SalonQP event at One Marylebone in London.

He told BBC Isle of Man: "It was a fantastic experience and people had travelled from all over the world."

Smith runs his business from a workshop in the north of the island.

The Bolton man fell in love with the art of watch making following a lecture by the world famous horologist Dr George Daniels CBE at the Manchester School of Horology.

Global clientele

He now runs Britain's only fully hand made watch business with wife Caroline and exports his works to a global clientele.

The 40-year-old admits he did not enjoy his time at school and was wondering what his next step would be when his father suggested the horology course.

"The course taught you how to repair clocks and watches and I thought it sounded like a great idea. I was accepted and the rest took off from there."

"The first day was the best day of education I had ever received.

"For the first time in my life I enjoyed schooling and we were using tools and machinery to make clock components, it was an amazing experience.

"It is an unusual job but I have never been one for following the pack."



There is currently a two year waiting list for Smith's creations

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There are over 30 individual trades involved in making a complete watch and there are only a handful of people in the world that can do so.

'Huge learning curve'

"My first pocket watch took a year and a half to complete and my second took five years. It's a huge learning curve."

Smith moved to the Isle of Man in 1998 to learn from Dr Daniels while working on the now famous 'Millennium' Series of watches.

He worked with Daniels until completion of the Series 3 years later, and then set up his own workshop on the Island where he now makes his own series of spectacular hand made watches - the Series 2.

George and Roger have stayed in close contact, and earlier this year George, now 84, announced his designs for a new limited series of watches, which are to be made for him by Roger.

The highlight of the recent show was the unveiling of the prototype Daniels' Anniversary wristwatch by Daniels himself.



Smith was inspired to take up the art of watchmaking by Dr George Daniels

"I first met George when I was 19-years-old and he came to the college for a day to talk to the students. He is an incredible man.

"I didn't realise at that stage that it was possible for a man to make a watch entirely by hand from start to finish.

'Space traveller'

"I remember he came into the workshop and I asked what he had on the end of his watch chain. He pulled out the most incredible pocket watch. It was a very famous watch known as the 'space traveller'.

"He designed it back in the 1970s to celebrate man landing on the moon and he was so passionate about his work that I knew at that point that this is what I wanted to do with my life."

The [SalonQP show](#) is the only event of its kind in the UK and drew collectors, enthusiasts and media from across the globe to experience first hand the very best in contemporary watch making.

Smith's wife joined the business a year ago as the general business manager. Caroline who is from the island said: "We displayed four of our watches and the response was fantastic."

"The new 'Open Dial' Series 2 attracted a huge amount of attention and the feedback was great."



The SalonQP exhibition attracted collectors from all over the world

Each of Roger's Series 2 wristwatches has over 220 individual pieces and can take up to five months to make. The watches sell for between £72,000 and £120,000.






Although the case, hands and dials are all made from either Gold, Silver or Platinum, 90% of the cost is labour taken to make and hand finish every single component of the mechanism - the beating heart of the watch.

Roger Smith has made over 50 watches from hand so far in his career and currently has a two year waiting list.


To see more, [view our gallery of the SalonQP exhibition](#) .

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