



UP ON A HIGH

BY CHUANG PECK MING

Chanel's new Les Eternelles de Chanel collection of diamond watches cost around a cool S\$1 million each. Such high-priced jewellery timepieces are clearly created for the ladies. But not all watches with prices inflated by bling are made for the fairer sex. Watchmakers can charge the men even more when they decorate that tourbillon or minute repeater with precious stones. It is probably why Roger Dubuis can stick a S\$1.09 million price tag on its new skeleton double flying tourbillon, the Excalibur Star of Infinity. Not just its case, but its movement is also paved with diamonds. Only the super rich can afford these million-dollar timepieces – and these people are the rare few largely untouched by these uncertain times. Still, high-end watch brands have continued to launch pricey models – often marketing them as special editions – even as they are touting “affordable luxury” by unveiling watches with more down-to-earth prices. Here is a sample of this year's new timepieces priced above S\$10,000.

1) Ulysse Nardin Classico Manufacture (S\$26,300)

The new Classico Manufacture timepiece is the first in Ulysse Nardin's Classico collection to be equipped with an in-house movement. Housed in a 40 mm rose gold case, the UN-320 calibre boasts a silicium hairspring and an anchor escapement, which makes the watch highly accurate.

2) Hublot Classic Fusion House of Mandela (US\$30,900 for the men's version, US\$33,200 for the ladies')

The Classic Fusion House of Mandela is Hublot's tribute to Nelson Mandela. Crafted in gold, there are two versions of the watch: the men's piece has a 45 mm case while the ladies' case is 42 mm with a diamond-decked bezel. The dial bears the totem of the Mandela family tree and a bee that represents the various branches of the family. The bee is inspired by Nelson Mandela's Xhosa name, Rolihlahla, which translates as “he who is brave enough to fetch the honey from the honeycomb”. The timepiece is limited to 95 pieces, which refers to Mr Mandela's age when he died.

3) MB&F HM6 Space Pirate (S\$360,200)

If you find this spaceship-looking timepiece familiar, it is not surprising. MB&F's HM6 Space Pirate came out in end-2014. But the earlier model was in titanium – and it was recently the winner of the Best of Best prize at the Red Dot international design competition. The newly launched HM6 RT has a red gold case.

But it is not your usual red gold which is defined as 3N and 4N gold. The HM6 RT is in 5N red gold, typically a mix of 75 per cent gold and 25 per cent copper. A small amount of palladium is added to the mixture, eliminating, or at least reducing, the copper tarnishing. This ensures that the timepiece “keeps its youthful good looks as it ages gracefully”. While the original edition – which sells for S\$324,200 – is limited to 50 pieces, the latest edition has 18 pieces.

4) Chanel Les Eternelles de Chanel (about S\$1 million)

The Les Eternelles de Chanel is a set of three high jewellery timepieces – one pays tribute to the camellia, the flower of choice of Chanel founder Gabrielle Chanel; another honours the comet that she created in 1932 for her Bijoux de Diamants collection; and the third watch is a nod to the feather, which inspired Chanel for its graceful lightness. Each of these quartz-driven timepieces is wrapped in 41.52 carats of diamonds and sapphires.



5) Parmigiani Fleurier Tonda 1950 Tourbillon (S\$214,100, S\$222,300 with diamonds)

Only 3.4 mm thick, the automatic movement that powers Parmigiani Fleurier's Tonda 1950 Tourbillon is the world's thinnest for a flying tourbillon with micro-rotor. It has taken two years of research and development to create the movement, PF517, which in the new watch is housed in a 40 mm rose or white gold case. The secret of its slimmness, according to Parmigiani, is the integration of the platinum micro-rotor into the main plate, saving an extra layer. The tourbillon is protected by the world's lightest cage, which is made of titanium and weighing just 0.255 g. This makes the tourbillon more efficient and the watch more accurate. Tonda 1950 is available in five dials: grey mother of pearl, white or black jade, grained white and blue abyss with Cotes de Geneva decoration.

6) Breitling Emergency II (S\$24,450 in black DLC coating titanium; S\$21,470 in normal titanium)

The Breitling Emergency watch first appeared in 1995; and for the next 15 years, 40,000 pieces were sold. And 20 people were saved, thanks to the timepiece. Emergency II, launched in 2013 but only approved by the US and Singapore governments this year, is an improved model and includes three new features: a new rechargeable battery; a miniaturised dual frequency transmitter; and an unprecedented integrated antenna system. With the integration of these microelectronic and micro technical innovations, Breitling has created “a safety and survival instrument in all distress situations on land, at sea and in the air”.

7) Vacheron Constantin Metiers d'Art Florilege (S\$177,000 for 20-piece limited edition set with round diamonds, S\$218,000 for the baguette-set version in a limited edition of five pieces)

The Metiers d'Art Florilege collection must be selling well for Vacheron Constantin to launch three new models two years in the line after its first appearance. An enamelled dial with exotic flower motifs are the trio's standout feature. “The dials are adorned with colourful petals that appear so real that one could almost touch their rounded volumes, velvety feel or even catch a hint of their delicate scent,” Vacheron says. The dials are set in a 37 mm white gold case rimmed with diamonds. The set in round diamonds is limited to 20 pieces and in baguette diamonds five pieces.

8) IWC Portofino For Two (S\$21,600 for the steel pair with diamonds, S\$24,550 for the red gold)

You don't need rings to say “I do”. Get the new Portofino For Two instead. They are a pair of IWC timepieces designed for couples – the smaller Portofino Automatic 37 in a 37 mm case for her, and the Portofino Automatic in a 40 mm case for him. Both are powered by self-winding movements. But no rings doesn't mean no diamonds. For Two comes with optional models decorated with diamonds or

gemstones for her. Couples have eight versions to pick from in the collection: six red gold and two stainless steel.

9) Laurent Ferrier Galet Square (US\$38,000 in steel, US\$53,000 in rose gold)

The Galet Square introduces not just Laurent Ferrier's first cushion-shaped case but also its first watch in a stainless steel case, alongside a rose gold version. The new steel model is obviously priced lower than the usual Laurent Ferrier timepiece, which has a gold or platinum case. But the price is still high for many buyers – especially when it is still fitted with the self-winding FBN229.01 calibre, the third movement Laurent Ferrier developed in-house.

10) Roger Dubuis Excalibur Star of Infinity (S\$1.09 million)

Visible through the skeletal dial, the tips of the star-shaped skeleton double flying tourbillon movement point to several hour-markers, enhancing clarity. They appear to stretch out towards that vast expanse of space – the infinity invoked in its name. Roger Dubuis still makes the most of its Astral Skeleton concept, one based on the star-shaped design of its contemporary movements, to produce this latest dazzler. Indeed, it is literally a dazzler: the watch's 45 mm white gold case is decked with 14.93 carats of diamonds. ■

