

THE TRAVELER'S GUIDE TO INSPIRED PURSUITS

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VIRTUOSO LIFE

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From jewels
in India
to fashion in Paris,
travel richly...

THE
Style
ISSUE

All in the Wrist

Boutique Swiss watchmakers craft timeless bespoke treasures.

BY MICHAEL CLERIZO

New York and London run international finance. Paris and Milan rule fashion. High-end watchmaking belongs to Geneva and, well, just Geneva. Strolling from the Swiss city's lakefront to its outer edge without passing the headquarters of a major watch brand – or one of the hundreds of firms that supply the industry – is as impossible as traversing Rome without passing a church.

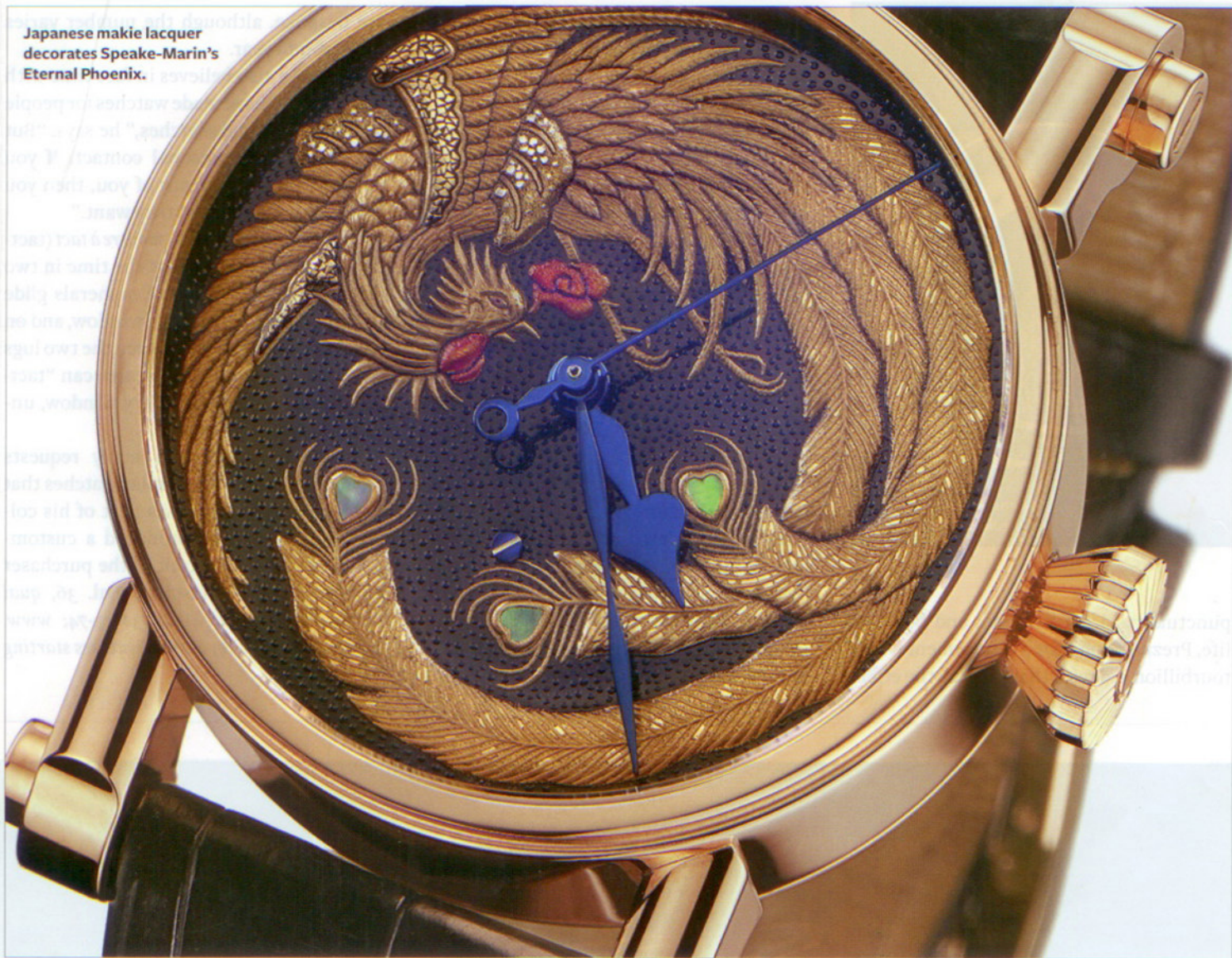
Religion is at the heart of the city's abundance of watchmakers. By the sixteenth century, Geneva's goldsmiths had earned renown throughout Europe for their jewelry. Then, in 1541, the city became the fiefdom of religious leader John Calvin. A proponent of the austere life, Calvin banned the making and wearing of jewelry.

To save their livelihoods, the goldsmiths pleaded with Calvin for permission to transfer their skills to watchmaking, a trade already established in France, Italy, and Germany. Watches, the goldsmiths argued,



Hours of luxury: Handcarved platinum dragons with diamond eyes decorate Speake-Marin's custom-made Fighting Time watch.

Japanese makie lacquer decorates Speake-Marin's Eternal Phoenix.



BIG BOYS DO BESPOKE

Three of the most famous names in watchmaking, Rolex, Vacheron Constantin, and Patek Philippe, can also prepare highly personalized versions of their standard watches with unique dials and sets of hands.

Two newer brands, Roger Dubuis (founded in 1995) and Parmigiani (founded in 1976), both established by master watchmakers, create a small number of bespoke watches each year. These companies will even send a representative to meet clients at their homes or offices.

On the other hand, visiting the headquarters of a great watch brand means entering a world of richly appointed rooms where white-gloved butlers serve champagne while you eye the company art collection. When the time comes to return to the hotel or the airport, a limousine awaits.

Parmigiani Fleurier S.A. rue du Temple 11, Fleurier; 41-32/862-66-30; www.parmigiani.com

Roger Dubuis Boutique 3 rue du Rhône, Geneva; 41-22/321-28-28; www.rogerdubuis.com

Rolex S.A. rue François-Dussaud 3-5-7, Geneva; 41-22/302-22-00; www.rolex.com

Salon Patek Philippe S.A. 41 rue du Rhône, Geneva; 41-22/809-50-50; www.patek.com

Vacheron Constantin Boutique 7 quai de l'Île, Geneva; 41-22/316-17-40; www.vacheron-constantin.com

Peter Speake-Marin

The young gun among independent Geneva watchmakers, 39-year-old Englishman Speake-Marin trained at a prestigious Swiss watchmaking school in Neuchâtel and studied and restored watches in London before returning to Switzerland in the mid-1990s to work for Renaud & Papi, a subsidiary of watchmaking giant Audemars Piguet. Today he has his own atelier with six employees and an annual output of 200 watches, of which about 30 are bespoke.

Speake-Marin showed his first watches at industry fairs, finding buyers but also learning, he says, that “many people wanted something different, something unique.”

One Speake-Marin client requested a