

## Time of your life

Claire Adler

WHEN it comes to buying a luxury watch, London has a plethora of high-end stores and specialist boutiques to choose from. But Marcus Margulies is arguably the City's best-known watch man. An exuberant, outspoken character, his boutique – Marcus, on Bond Street – is home to a vast range of types and styles.

“There are watches here that jump out at you and force you to think,” he enthuses. “They challenge you intellectually for their ability to combine beauty and technology.

“Everyone seems to have art advisers nowadays, but I think they're being ripped off. Maybe people should ask themselves what they like,” he adds with a wry smile.

Those “thought-provoking” ranges largely refer to the number of up-and-coming independent watchmakers Marcus stocks. These include Jorg Hysek, who Margulies has tipped for big things. The watchmaker's latest range is the HD3 Complications series, which focuses on innovative time displays such as a mechanical watch case that flips upwards to reveal a digital watch.

Other examples include Richard Mille, who started out in 2001 and makes just 900 timepieces a year; Alain Silberstein, a former architect; and Anglo-Swiss duo Greubel Forsey, whose elegant watches combine incredibly advanced technology.

Of course, the avant-garde is not for everyone. A number of customers who bought the Franck Muller Crazy Hours watch – replete with a colourful, mixed-up jumping hour dial – returned to the store several months later, admitting defeat and asking what the trick was to telling the time.

Greubel Forsey's Invention Piece

Alongside these new designers, Marcus sells established names – Audemars Piguet, Hublot, Piaget, Harry Winston Rare Timepieces – and jewellery watches from de Grisogono. There are currently waiting lists for limited editions of Audemars Piguet's latest Alinghi and Hublot's Luna Rossa; prices range from around £3,000 (\$6,146, €4,301) to more than £1m.

One of Margulies' most memorable sales was to a man nursing a severe hangover. “He came in and spent an obscene amount on a handful of watches. I was literally begging him, saying he shouldn't buy so many in one



go, but the guy insisted and bought the lot. He left the shop muttering, ‘this will be my best lesson never to get so drunk and behave so irresponsibly ever again’.”

Margulies, 65, encourages customers to question why they like a particular watch before buying it. “Some people love to be seen to be wearing the latest big design. But that can be a bit like a woman who dresses head-to-toe in Chanel without personalising her look,” he says. “I think blind obedience to one brand, however fantastic, is a bit boring. The key to a great collection is picking the cream of each brand.”

Of his own collection, Margulies's favourite is a super slimline 1960s platinum Audemars Piguet Extra Flat that belonged to his late father, Alexander, who set up Time Products, the owner of Marcus, after moving from Poland to England.

The company started out distributing inexpensive watches made in the then-Soviet Union, but in 1964, a year after Margulies Jnr joined, Alexander created his own brand. Made in Russia and sold in Britain, he called it Sekonda. It is now Britain's best-selling timepiece, with around 1.75m sold annually.

Margulies opened Marcus in 1999. Spread



Above: Marcus, 170 Bond Street; Below: Marcus Margulies; Centre: Audemars Piguet's Alinghi

over four floors, the centre piece is a dramatic, listed glass staircase. Downstairs, below street level, is a vault that houses Margulies's most prized possessions. Opening hidden drawers, he pulls out a rare Tourbillon by Greubel Forsey. There are also Audemars Piguet models valued at hundreds of thousands of pounds and delicate, tiny ladies dress watches from Parisian watchmaker Léon Hatot, dating back to the early 1900s.

“A truly great watch combines high technology, a good name and solid design,” says Margulies, surveying the treasure trove. “I can't always explain why I like something. Certain ones just sing to me.

“True collectors buy what they like, to satisfy their own taste and desire, no one else's. Only a minority [know] what they're buying and I think others are missing out. What's more beautiful – an older woman who has plastic surgery to make her look younger or a woman who looks beautiful for her age? I think it's the latter.”

Hiding the vault's secrets away and climbing the stairs back onto the bright and airy shop floor, he adds: “People see me as opinionated. But that's because I've seen more watches in the last week than most people see in a lifetime.”

