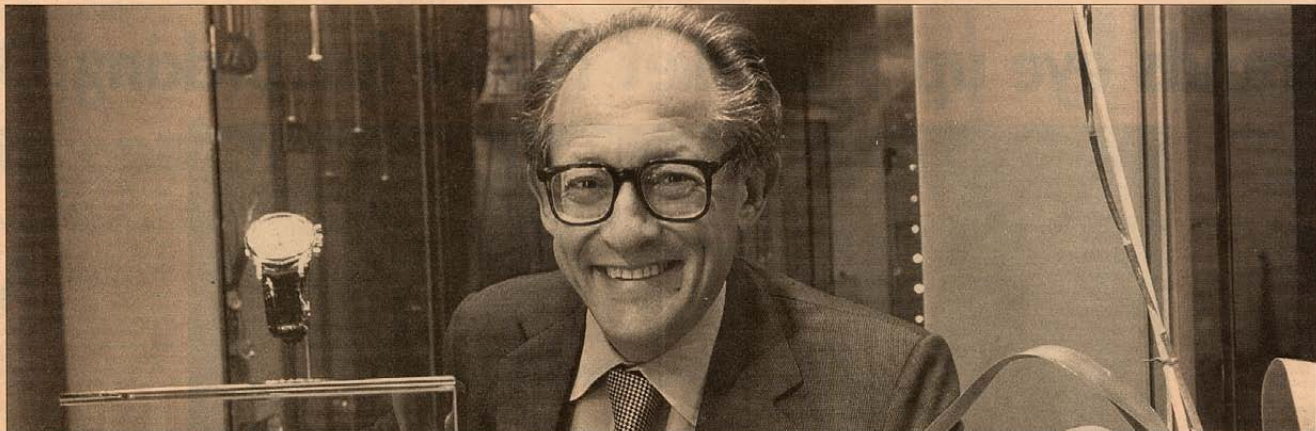


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SPECIAL REPORT WATCHES & JEWELLERY

Marcus Margulies: 'I adored my father - he gave me great principles and I owe it to him that I came into this profession'

Abigail Ashwood

COLLECTORS MARCUS MARGULIES

'I don't want anything that looks flashy'

The son of Sekonda's creator gives **Simon de Burton** a private viewing of his most prized possessions

The Marcus watch store in London's Bond Street is advertised as containing "the most important collection of watches in the world". It has to be said that the line-up of dial names is truly formidable, ranging from long-established, high-end makes such as Girard Perregaux and Audemars Piguet to more recent yet well respected producers including Franck Muller, Richard Mille and Greubel Forsey.

The store belongs to Marcus Margulies whose family company, Time Products, dates back to the early 1960s when his father Alexander moved to England from Poland and established a business distributing inexpensive Eloc watches and other timepieces imported from the USSR.

By 1964, a year after his son had joined the company, Margulies senior had decided to create his own brand of watches that

would be made in Russia and sold in Britain. He called it Sekonda, and it is now the UK's best-selling timepiece with around 1.75m examples finding their way onto new wrists each year.

It is prodigious sales figures such as this that enabled the founding of the Marcus store in 1999 - a tranquil, architect-designed shine to haute-horlogerie laid out over four floors that holds more than 1,000 watches on stock at prices ranging from £3,000 to what Mr Margulies will only refer to as "seven figures".

But what, we wonder, does the proprietor of "the most important collection of watches in the world" count dearest to his heart? What pieces does the man with access to horological heaven actually regard as so special - not necessarily in terms of monetary value or complication but in terms of sentiment and sheer

watchmaking significance - that he would never consider selling them? The answer is provided within seconds of meeting the man: wrapped around his left wrist is one of the thinnest, most elegant, most delicate-looking square-cased wristwatches one could imagine.

"My father lived life very simply and this was his one and only 'good' watch," explains Mr Margulies. "I adored my father - he gave me great principles and I owe it to him that I came into this profession, so this watch is probably the most important one I own," he says.

"It is a platinum Audemars Piguet Extra Flat from the early 1960s, one of the great classics. I love the symmetry and the way the case blends with the dial and I always wear it when I have somewhere really special to go.

"Another watch that I own personally and consider to be truly important is also an Audemars Piguet, this time the Royal Oak perpetual. It is probably the best luxury sports watch ever made, and I don't think many people in

the watch world would disagree with that - if it wasn't, it wouldn't still be considered a hot design today, 35 years after it was created."

Retiring to the shop's impenetrable vaults Mr Margulies produces a slim briefcase which he opens to reveal around 30 watches from his private collection, one of which is a delightful pocket piece that is contained inside a gold sovereign with a hinged front - Mr Margulies gave it to his father as a 75th birthday present.

"That and 23 others in here I would never, ever consider selling," he insists. "All but three I have bought personally with the remainder having been given to me by very good friends. Some are significant to me in my business, such as the first Marcus Muller from a series of King Constalidor watches that were made especially for the store in pvd-coated steel with mirror dials by Franck Muller, and there are also some flat Vacheron Constantin watches that I bought when I was about 30 years of age.

"They are attractive watches but I don't really wear them now as my taste has developed and become more complex. It is like that with watches - just as your palate evolves over the years through experiencing different wines and foods, so your taste in watches evolves as you have more to do with them.

"I am also particularly fond of my Girard Perregaux with three gold bridges that was a gift from someone very special - it embodies what I really look for in a watch nowadays, which is something that is understated, takes time to make and, above all, is only appreciated by people who actually understand watches. I don't want anything that looks flashy," says Mr Margulies with a mischievous glint in his eye, before presenting another of his favourites: a recently-acquired Hublot Big Bang in white, undoubtedly one of the more ostentatious timepieces of recent years.

"Well, you have to have fun with watches just as you have to have fun in life and the Big

Bang, as well as being a brilliantly conceived watch, is certainly fun. I wear it for skiing."

The briefcase also contains some fascinating rarities, such as a Falcone from the 1970s that is gold and mis-shapen having been inspired by Salvador Dali. Mr Margulies describes it as "quite amusing". There is a price tag on the back that reads £77,550.

But probably the most historically significant of all the watches in the Margulies collection has yet to arrive because it is still in the process of being made - it is a Greubel Forsey tourbillon.

"I sell them in the store and I just felt I had to buy one myself because, in my opinion, Greubel Forsey makes the best watches in the world. The degree of craftsmanship is beyond compare and they can only be made in tiny numbers - the team there will never get marks for salesmanship, but they will for passion. To me that's what it's really all about."

'You have to have fun with watches, just as you have to have fun in life'