

My Personal Passion of Watches and my Favourite Watch Designer

Alastair Meiklejon - Senior Valuer



Patek Phillipe and Audemars Piguet with Gerald Genta - The King of Haute Horlogerie and Design

Is Gerald Genta the greatest wristwatch designer of all time? It's a question that will cause debates around the watchmaking world, however what cannot be denied is that with a CV like his, it would certainly take a career of some distinction to stand against him in any serious argument.

Starting at Universal Geneve in the 1950s, Genta started a trend of creating some of the most instantly recognisable watches of the 20th Century, with one his first pieces being the understated and yet iconic Polerouter Microtor – setting the tone for much of his later and much lauded career.

Whilst the 1970s could be (and are by many) considered a decade that taste forgot, Genta was inspired and came up with two de facto design classics – still revered today and most probably will be in production for quite a while – The Audemars Piguet Royal Oak in 1971, and the Patek Philippe Nautilus in 1976.

These watches completely changed everyone's view on luxury watch manufacturing, for many years the definition of which was a precious metal case, with as many complications as one could muster, or even understand. Initially both watches were cases in stainless steel and the measurements at the time were fairly hefty – whilst a 39mm case in 2020 is nothing to get excited about, back in the early 70s it was a complete revelation.

At ten times the cost of a Rolex Submariner, this watch was pulling no punches and it was clear what market it was presenting itself to, it wasn't a tool watch, it was a clear luxury style piece – but with all the foundations of heritage with the brand.

It was during this period he also worked on designs for IWC and Cartier. Whilst all of his pieces had a certain je ne sais quoi, they all were unique and retained the Genta DNA that set them apart from the more pedestrian offerings from the big players, something that certainly was needed during the quartz crisis that nearly destroyed the Swiss watch industry.

The joy of both the Nautilus and the Royal Oak is that there are models to suit all budgets – from under £10,000 for a gold and steel version of both models, right up to over a million pounds for some incredibly 'esoteric' models encrusted with more diamonds than the average royal tiara. The key with these both the Patek Philippe and the Audemars Piguet is knowing the models and their differences and desirability factor – it can be tens of thousands of pounds difference, for what may look to the untrained eye, a very similar timepiece.

Genta carried on designing, and running moderately successful watch brands for many years after the groundbreaking designs of his portfolio became as recognisable as the brand they represented, and inspired many 'tribute' style watches for years to come. Gerald Genta died in 2012 and left not only a heritage for many brands, but a basis of design that keeps on reinventing itself, and will for years to come.



Gerald Genta's designs for the Audemars Piguet Royal Oak (left) and the Patek Philippe Nautilus



Audemars Piguet Royal Oak 4100, 1981



Patek Philippe Nautilus 3700, 1981

Call us today to enquire about an appointment on 01883 722736 or email enquiries@doerrvaluations.co.uk or visit our website www.doerrvaluations.co.uk