



## Androgynous zones

Watchmakers are making time for gender neutrality.  
By RHONDA RICHE

2015 WAS A WATERMARK YEAR for identity politics. Bruce Jenner transitioned to Caitlyn, and gender-bending has been a theme throughout popular culture. On television, there's *Transparent*. Coming to movie theatres in late November is *The Danish Girl*, which tells the story of one of the first cases of sexual reassignment. In fashion, the new designer at Gucci, Alessandro Michele, has become a star known for blurring the line between masculine and feminine. And in bookstores, you might find *Sex and Unisex: Fashion, Feminism and the Sexual Revolution*, in which author Jo B. Paoletti points out that "Many of our gender stereotypes are superficial, arbitrary and subject to change."

Such change has become evident in the world of watches. Over the past three decades, taste has swung toward hockey puck-sized sport watches for men and girly watches for women. But haute horology is having a unisex moment. In the world of high-end timepieces, manufacturers are becoming more gender-fluid in making and marketing their wares.

One of the most enduring examples of unisex watches is the Cartier Tank, launched in 1917 and said to have been inspired by a military tank. Its linear shape reads as neither masculine nor feminine, and over the years it has found favour with Greta Garbo, Cary Grant, Jackie Onassis and Andy Warhol.

A more recent example is the IWC Portofino 37, which was launched in late 2014 by the International Watch Company, the super luxury watchmaker based in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, which promoted the model with a deliberately ambiguous ad





campaign featuring Cate Blanchett, Ewan McGregor, Emily Blunt and Christoph Waltz.

IWC is not alone. As a publicist for the high-end Swiss watchmaker Tudor told us, “We do not generally categorize our models by gender; rather they are classified by size. Women are now wearing pieces that may have classically been categorized as men’s and vice versa, so this is truly dependent on the wearer.”

This year at Baselworld—think of it as Fashion Week for watches—Rolex made news on two fronts. It reintroduced the classic Rolex Oyster Perpetual Day-Date with a smaller 40 mm case to appeal to both men and women, and it upsized the Pearlmaster—a.k.a. the brand’s “crowning jewellery watch” (code for women’s watch)—from a 34 mm to a full 39 mm case with dials and set with sparkling gradient sapphires.

At one time it was understood that what made a watch acceptable as a form of male jewellery was that it also had a function. But males have become fans of fashionable accessorizing. Just as there are women who wear large-faced “boyfriend” styles, stacked with bangles and baubles, there are guys who sport bejewelled timepieces or mix chunky watches with multiple bracelets of beads, leather and chain.

Celebrity culture is a big influencer when it comes to this trend, with stars adding extra sparkle to watches they have purchased. But adding aftermarket diamonds to a watch can adversely affect its resale value, so why not just go for gems from the get-go? This fall, Tag Heuer—a company best known for luxury sport watches and its association with macho men like Steve McQueen—teamed up with model/actor Cara Delevingne to create a limited-edition, diamond-bezelled version of the iconic Carrera model.

Gender-fluid fashion is also finding a place in the mainstream. According to Paul Sine, vice-president of marketing for Timex Canada, “We’re seeing that, just like their female counterparts, male consumers like to incorporate trends into their style repertoire.” In 2012, Timex introduced the unisex Weekender collection, which mixes functional military-style NATO straps with patterns and brightly coloured dials for fellows who want to be more fashion-forward.

Serious collectors also welcome this tick-talking about gender and watches. Manufacturers are recognizing that there is a growing base of female collectors who are just as interested in complications and craftsmanship as they are in embellishments. Nomos Glashütte, an upstart watchmaker from Germany, is another high-end brand that doesn’t categorize its timepieces by gender. It is admired by watch fans for its Bauhaus-influenced sense of design, and it has just upped its innovation game by launching a new, ultra-thin automatic movement called the Neomatik. It’s just 3.2 mm thick, which is big news for those who are fascinated by the mechanics of watchmaking because it’s one of the first ultra-thin, self-winding calibers to be developed using 21st-century technology.

Just like those who don’t want to be defined by gender, this generation of watches knows it’s what’s inside that counts. ■



Montblanc  
Heritage  
Chronométrie  
Automatic



Rolex Oyster  
Perpetual  
Day-Date 39



Tag Heuer  
Carrera Special  
Edition Cara  
Delevingne



Q&Q Smile  
Solar Spice  
Series



IWC  
Portofino 37



Tudor Style



Jaeger-LeCoultre  
Grande Reverso  
Ultra Thin



Nomos Neomatik  
Minimatik  
Champagner



Breitling  
Chronomat  
38 SleekT