

New School of Cool

From Berlin to Geneva we're experiencing a fresh wave of watchmaking that combines metropolitan sophistication with crisp, hip-to-the-game design credentials. It's about time

Without using the dreaded 'hipster' word (oh, too late), it's hard to deny that there are plenty of high-end ventures keenly tapping the zeitgeist percolating in former urban wastelands, injecting a creative vision back into Brooklyn's Williamsburg district, Berlin's East and the East End of London. And why not? The protagonists of these urban frontiers all possess a keen aesthetic sense, a desire for good-old brand values, plus – critically – a disposable income.

Which goes a long way to explain an exciting new genre of watches finally coming to the boil, in defiance of traditional watchmaking's usual, rather slavish commitment to the old school (and not the cool old school). Dan Rookwood, Mr Porter's former US editor, now heading up editorial at Nike, puts it down to the renewed importance of style over fashion among the 30-somethings.

"I consider myself to be a stylish man with a well-attuned appreciation for the finer things in life," he says, from his home in Portland, Oregon. "But up until I turned 30, I just couldn't see the point in blowing thousands of dollars on a luxury timepiece rather than on things that actually matter – like rent, Apple products or Friday nights out.

"But we've grown up. My generation's tastes have become sophisticated with age."

Switzerland and Germany's watchmakers do sophistication in spades, as the micromechanics and build quality of the following four examples prove. But the concomitant cool factor is still a rare thing indeed.



NOMOS GLASHÜTTE TANGENTE
BAUHAUS

"Form ever follows function," goes Louis Sullivan's modernist maxim, and boy does anyone with a passing interest in early 20th-century architecture, chairs or lemon squeezers know it. So, with our best Bauhaus hats on, the circular timekeeper of two co-axial hands, describing an infinite 360-degree sweep of hours and minutes, is pure function with especially pleasing form. Something that Nomos Glashütte's modernist timekeepers do in arguably the finest Bauhaus fashion.

The Ore Mountains' watchmaker, formed in east Germany's horological heartland upon the fall of the Berlin Wall, has always insisted its design and philosophy are rooted in the Bauhaus's precursor, the Deutscher Werkbund design collective. But given that the latter's approach was a pursuit of industrialised and accessible quality over pure aesthetic, one can hardly blame Nomos for taking the opportunity to revel in the wider Bauhaus associations, on this, the centenary of Walter Gropius's modernist school.

Coming in three sizes – 33-, 35- and 38-millimetre diameters, for men and women alike – with sketch-paper dials encircled by red, blue or yellow, the source of inspiration here was the drawings of Bauhaus artist Paul Klee, who once said, "Art makes things visible". So, for this reason, the hands trace a coloured ring, elegantly depicting the basic principle of the watch: time moving in a circle.

£1,520

RADO DIAMASTER

As well as a cooler school of design, what's keeping today's Swiss watch alpine fresh isn't so much the clockwork as its packaging. The wonderful anachronism that is a mechanical timekeeper in the 21st century is increasingly being spiked with lightweight yet super-durable materials more at home in the suspension wishbone of an F1 car.



From ceramic to silicon, and even carbon fibre, you might think it's evolution for the sake of evolution, but scratch beneath the surface and... Well, scratching won't get you very far at all, as the seminal breakthrough of trailblazing Rado in the '60s explicitly set out to resist such abuse.

Its egg-shaped DiaStar Original looked like something Captain Kirk would wear, and for good reason: The case was formed not of steel, but a newfangled hard metal, tungsten carbide. It defined Rado's ultra-futurist manifesto. By the '80s Rado had mastered and pioneered the use of ultra-light and ultra-tough ceramic – sintered at a sizzling 900 degrees centigrade: virtually scratchproof, super lightweight and thanks to Rado's own high-tech method, endowed with an ethereal metallic glow. A particularly slick look that inspires the sort of sci-fi mechanical wizardry depicted here.

£2,200