



DEVOTED
TO WOMEN'S
WATCHES

WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

• *new times, new styles*

- *the stars of
the big screen*
- *haute joaillerie's
call of nature*
- *design on time*



Left: Dior injects a touch of 1920s glamour with the sleeking leathers of the Dior VIII Grand Bal Plumes. Below: Nelly Saunier, one of the few craftspeople practicing plumasserie today.

FLIGHTS

It is often said that 'time flies', and in 2012 some watch companies are taking this literally. From peacocks to ring-necked pheasants, feathers have become the perfect decorations for some of horology's most beautiful and unusual wristwatches.

Elizabeth Doerr

by Charles Jacquaud and other objects decorated with mosaics of kingfisher and/or peacock feathers.

MODERN FEATHERS

The use of feathers in horology shouldn't be altogether surprising since feather work and watchmaking share a need for manual dexterity and an eye for aesthetics. And Harry Winston is the latest in line to bow to the beauty of natural feathers as a decorative element with the introduction of Premier Feathers – a new 2012 family of timepieces showcasing the craft. In contrast to the feather dials of days gone by – which featured one single feather – Harry Winston's dials are exceedingly

intricate and do real justice to the term feather marquetry.

"Harry Winston mixes the hardest material known to man (diamond) with one of the softest (feather) to make a simultaneous symbol of love and power," the brand's CEO Frédéric de Harp declared at the launch of the timepieces. The design and creation of these three delicate dials was entrusted to French maître d'art Nelly Saunier, one of the few craftspeople practicing the technique of plumasserie today. Saunier's unique talent allows her to combine bird feathers to form a beautiful masterpiece of marquetry.

Obtained from species that are allowed to run free in a special park and that are raised specifically for marquetry, each feather – gathered when it falls naturally off the birds – is selected for its individual aesthetic. "Only the most beautiful are chosen," Saunier explains from her Paris workshop that has created colourful masterpieces for the likes of Jean-Paul Gaultier, Nina Ricci, Givenchy, Jean Charles de Castelbajac and Paco Rabanne. "I also use feathers that I find in nature or that people bring to me," she continues, saying that it is valuable for her to view the birds in a living state, see where the



Left: The Corum Buckingham, featuring a peacock feather dial in a gold case, was launched at the start of the 1970s.

OFFSHOOT

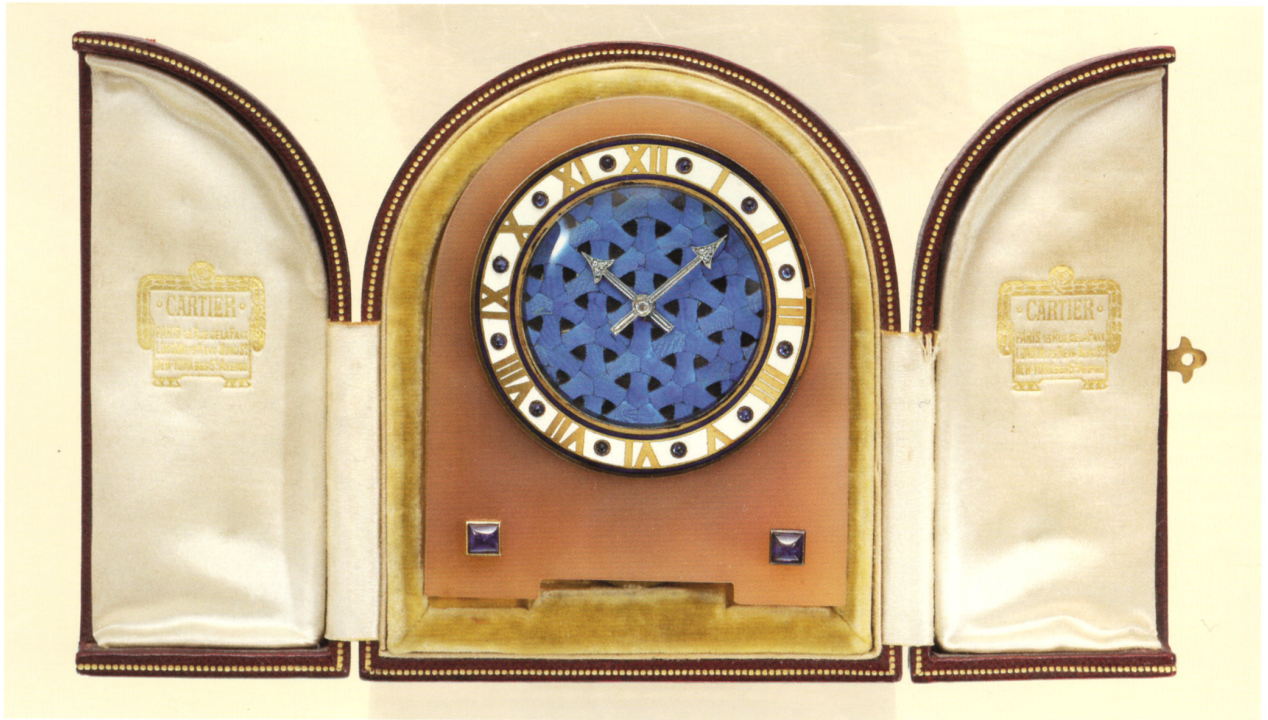
The Premier Feathers collection from Harry Winston demonstrates beautiful construction on the dials embellished with a choice of different pheasant or peacock feathers.



This year's biggest watch fairs saw several familiar brands using 'feather mosaic' on their dials. But as novel as it seems, this is an art that was actually practiced over half a century ago by the Aztecs. Records show that Spanish conquistadors carried a number of objects featuring this craft to Europe, where they ended up in curiosity cabinets or as part of encyclopedic collections of objects that had yet to be categorised in Renaissance Europe. The pieces became prized among Europe's royalty, and today the rare beauty of feather mosaic is once again gracing the most luxurious products.

Swooping forward to 1970s horology, Corum introduced a feather watch with a dial comprising a single peacock feather surrounded by a gold TV-screen-style case that allows the full beauty of the bird feather's pattern to be showcased within its frame. Cartier also used single feathers to decorate dials in the 1980s – a nod back to the brand's past when, in the late-1920s, it introduced various clocks designed





Above: Due to the natural fragility of feathers, pieces like this 1925 Cartier Pendulette Chevalet Kingfisher (attributed to Charles Jacquenau) are extremely rare. Below: Feather Dial Clock (attributed to Charles Jacquenau) are extremely rare. This model was sold by Antiquorum in 2007 for SFr.110,920. A platinum and yellow gold mechanical Cartier clock from 1929, decorated with kingfisher feathers, diamonds and onyx.



feather she has chosen was formerly situated on the bird's body and observe the animals in their natural habitats in order to be able to visualise her works of art. After gathering the feathers, she washes and steams them to restore texture and colour before precisely dissecting the parts she needs and adhering them to the object being embellished.

Fascinated by birds and feathers from a very young age, Nelly Saunier studied feather art at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Appliqués et des Métiers d'Art. "I became amazed by the creative possibilities of this technique," she enthuses. "From objects to fashion to works of art."

A PREMIER

Feathers add a soft, decorative and sometimes outrageous fashion element to the objects Saunier works on. Harry Winston's Premier Feathers is the first wristwatch dial she has created and each one takes approximately seven hours to make, due to the cutting and precise positioning under a loupe where Saunier's talented and experienced eye brings out the shimmer of the fragile, precious and organic material.

Each dial is, therefore, unique, hence the very limited production. Harry Winston expects to make 100 pieces in this year: 25 of each of the four different models. According to their

manufacturer, the shimmery dial of the silvered pheasant feathers is refined in its visuals, while the black and grey of the Lady Amherst pheasant feathers reflect elegance. The blues of the peacock feathers express femininity, and the deep-blue creation combining ring-necked pheasant feathers has a more mysterious look.

HIGH FASHION

Feathers are a constant theme in the world of *haute joaillerie* watches with both Cartier and Boucheron releasing exquisite jewelled beauties at this past year's fairs that have incredible mechanics to back them up – Boucheron having partnered with Girard-Perregaux to release a fancy version of the Three Golden Bridge tourbillon all dressed up like a swan called Cypris.

Dior, however, like Harry Winston has chosen to use the real deal. The Dior VIII Grand Bal collection is equipped with the brand's Inversé calibre: the functional rotor is placed dial side and designed to reproduce the swirl of a ballgown. Using feathers on the 38mm Plumes model was genius – what could better reproduce such an elaborate swoop? Embellished with approximately 0.89ct of diamonds, the unusual ceramic timepieces are limited to just 88 pieces each and are sure to be quickly snapped up by lovers of this unusual craft.

Further information: www.nelly-saunier.com